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THE MAN AND THE DRAGON

ALEXANDER OTIS

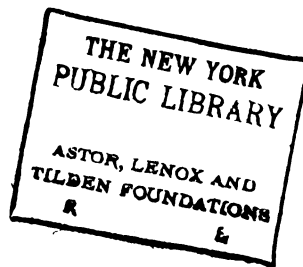


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**THE MAN
AND
THE DRAGON**







So she laid her head on his shoulder, with her bright hair
sweeping his cheek. *Frontispiece*

THE MAN AND THE DRAGON

BY
ALEXANDER OTIS
Author of "Hearts are Trumps"

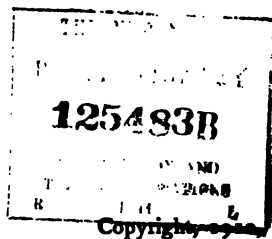
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

J. V. McFALL

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THE MAN AND THE DRAGON

CHAPTER I

THE FAIR INCENDIARY

THE "Carthage News" office was full of tobacco smoke at half-past eight o'clock on a bright fall morning. At four rickety desks, by the dusty windows, sat four young men in their shirt-sleeves, cutting, pasting, writing, smoking continuously. The walls of the place were dirty and patched with choice paragraphs and illustrations, often with derisive comments written in the margins, representing frivolous interludes in the strenuous life and vicissitudes of provincial journalism. At the farthest and darkest corner of the room were the files of the other Carthage papers, covered with dust and overcoats. One corner of the floor was boarded off into a box, with thin wooden partitions, and within the telegraph instruments were ticking away about the news of the previous night: the session of Congress, the doings of Parliament, the lynching at Atlanta, the latest originality of the German emperor,—a chorus of heterogeneous chords in the concert of continents that went to make up the music of the sphere.

All these the young woman in the wooden box was transcribing on her typewriter as calmly as though she were measuring so many yards of tape. At another corner of the room was a second small space, similarly partitioned off, and constituting the editorial sanctum; and there sat John Price, grinding away at his copy.

Price had left school when he was fourteen years of age, and had begun life in the composing room of the "News," then just launched upon its checkered career. He was boy of all-work. He swept the floor and picked out the loose type from the sweepings. He proved and washed the galleys. He held copy for the proof-reader. Gradually he began to help the "job man" set the "ads" when there was a rush. Then he was given a "frame," and at seventeen he was a full-fledged compositor. When the linotype came he began to do local work, if the city editor was short-handed.

At twenty-two years of age Price was a regular member of the local force. He had been earning considerably more money at the linotype than he could command at first as a reporter; but he longed for the larger and freer life. For seven years he had worked at the local desk, gradually pushing his way to the front, slowly building up a small bank account; smoking, writing, reading, thinking,—learning things not told in books, growing wise in the knowledge of life, imbibing all sorts of general informa-

tion from the men he met and conversed with, gaining force and character from the stir of the city life.

On his twenty-ninth birthday, and about two months ago, Price had made a bold coup, and suddenly found himself the most talked-about, the most feared, and, by a small circle of friends, the most respected man in the city of Carthage.

This was his opportunity, and he was wrestling with it. "Mother," he would say, as he came home pale and haggard with the strain of his bustling day, "I have got old Opportunity by his forelock, and it will stay in my fist or his scalp will come off with it."

John Price was now the telegraph editor, city editor, managing editor, editor-in-chief, and business manager of the "News." How long would it last? Every cent of income earned, every cent of salary saved went to pay the monthly instalments upon Congressman Parkerson's stock. The contract, which had made Price this opportunity, provided that there should be a regular payment on the last day of every month, or that the option should at once expire.

John Price had been gifted by nature with a comprehensive intellect and a fine physique. Full six feet two in his stockings, he was rather slender for his height, with a resulting appearance of lankiness unpardonable in the eyes of the fair sex. His face was set in solemn mould,

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with high, narrow forehead, prominent nose, angular jaw, and jet black hair as straight and sleek as that of his Puritan grandsires, for he came of eastern Massachusetts stock, though his early years had all been passed in the middle west.

While in process of editing a mass of manuscript with wonderful celerity, he paused doubtfully over the following editorial from the pen of one of his subordinates:

FADS IN THE SCHOOLS

Our local article yesterday on the efforts of the Woman's Educational and Industrial Union to secure the introduction of sewing and carpentry work into our public schools, seems to have provoked some criticism.

The trouble with this business is that it is a fad, and a fad of women who do not send their own children to the public schools. We will venture to assert that not one in four of these women have a mother's interest in public school training.

Do they regard the public schools as solely the place for the education of the sons and daughters of seamstresses and carpenters?

"That's rather warm," muttered Price, to himself; "but I guess it's about right, so in it goes. Truth is like soup, always to be served hot, otherwise a mess of

insipid jelly;" and he gave the copy along with a mass of other articles to the dirty-faced boy that entered.

"What a dismal place!" exclaimed a high-pitched feminine voice without.

"How close it is," complained another female voice.

"Where is Mr. Price?" queried a third.

"This way, ma'm," said the copy boy.

Price tossed his pipe into a corner of his den, and made a dive for his coat. He was in the act of struggling into it when the ladies entered.

"Good morning, Mr. Price," said Mrs. DeWitt, as the trio filed into his office; "is this where you hide yourself?"

The delegation consisted of the clergyman's wife, who had thus spoken; Mrs. DuBois, whose husband was a professor in the local university, and Mrs. Nathan Everett, one of the social leaders of Carthage. The editor was quite disturbed by the sudden and unusual visitation, and saw breakers ahead. "What can I do for you, ladies?" he asked suavely, as though he had no inkling of their errand.

"We were a little disturbed over your article," said Mrs. DeWitt, "or was it your article? Well, over *an* article in the 'News' of yesterday, which spoke in what seemed to us a flippant and unpleasant way, of our effort to introduce sewing and manual training into the public schools."

"Confound Sam! I expected just this; I'm in for it," thought Price to himself; his only expression of it was a sigh of patience.

"A very disagreeable article, indeed; I'm sure you did not write it, Mr. Price," added Mrs. Everett.

"I was really quite hurt that you should print it," put in Mrs. DuBois.

"I am afraid my young man was a little indiscreet," admitted the editor, "and I wish I had revised his copy a little more carefully; I'm so sorry it hurt your feelings."

"But it is not to make any complaint we have come to you," said Mrs. DeWitt, tactfully. "The fact is, we want your help in this matter. We can't get along without you, Mr. Price."

"Your paper reaches a class of readers, —" began Mrs. Everett.

"Oh, dear, no," interrupted Mrs. DeWitt, "Mrs. Everett was going to say that the 'News' is so widely read by all classes, —"

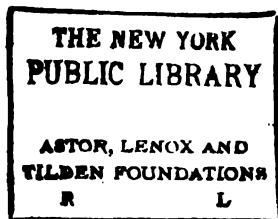
"Especially since you have taken it in hand," added Mrs. DuBois.

"But, ladies, supposing I really do not agree with you, 'what can I do about it?'" asked the editor, though not sure that he had any serious convictions on the subject.

"We can convince you in ten minutes," said Mrs.



It was just a bright young face, surrounded by a halo
of soft blond hair. *Page 7*



DeWitt, with a smile so sweet that any ordinary man would declare himself convinced on the spot, of any proposition, possible or impossible.

Price hesitated, finding the position extremely awkward, but his paper was committed to another view by a faithful and conscientious employee whom he disliked to leave in the lurch, and he regretfully shook his head.

Just then John Price became conscious of a ray of sunlight in his doorway; that was how it appeared to him, anyway. It was just a bright young face, surrounded by a halo of soft blond hair; just a jaunty hat, with something blue on it, whether it was a ribbon or a feather or a flower Price didn't observe; just a pair of eyes to match the something blue on the hat, just a soft gray gown, trimmed with blue edging, to match the something blue on the hat and in the eyes.

"Beg pardon, Miss Everett, I — I was so busy talking, I did n't notice — I — I, won't you have a chair?" stammered the editor.

"Why, Vivian," said Mrs. Everett, "I thought you were going to wait for me down in the office below!"

"I was tired of waiting, and as I met Mr. Price at Narragansett last summer, you remember, mother, I thought I would like to see his office,— and him in it."

Mrs. Everett did not remember; was very sure, in fact, that her daughter had neglected to mention the circum-

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stance, but deferred her comments to a more convenient season, and vouchsafed a forced smile.

"So this is the den where you eat people, is it, Mr. Price?" asked the young lady, imperturbably, and evidently rather enjoying the mild sensation her advent had created in this secluded lair of the genus masculine.

"This is the place where I work," acknowledged poor Price, with a suddenly-assumed lamb-like bearing, contrasting strongly with his previous self-confidence.

"And so you are going to be disagreeable, Mr. Price to mamma and Mrs. DeWitt and Mrs. DuBois and me, and all the other nice women in Carthage, are you, and write horridly rude things about our efforts to make the school better?"

"I did n't suppose you all took it so much to heart, — had n't thought much about the question any way," protested the editor.

"And you have not enough to do fighting people who are trying to do wrong; and must needs make war upon a lot of women who are trying to do right?"

"I, I capitulate, Miss Everett" (striking a bell). "I am very much afraid, ladies, that I have, unintentionally, been very rude. I left the matter wholly to one of my associates and did not give it the personal attention it doubtless deserved."

"A man is always very rude when he does not agree

with us," generalized Miss Everett, with malice prepense, as she smiled into his eyes, in a fetching way she had.

The copy-boy entered in response to the bell, and Price said, without blinking the matter: "Tell the foreman to kill that editorial on 'Fads in the Schools.'"

The boy rushed into the composing room, shouting at the top of his lungs: "Der Boss says ter kill der fads in der schools!"

"I should have added," continued Miss Everett, "that a man is always a *perfect* gentleman when he does what we want. Now we will expect to see something lovely about us in the 'News' this evening. Come, mamma, Mr. Price looks as though he were extremely busy, and I have a lot of shopping to do."

The ladies filed out of the editorial room and marched to the elevator. As they entered it Mrs. DeWitt said: "Vivian Everett, I am flabbergasted,—that is the only word which will express it,—completely flabbergasted! How did you ever manage to tame that dreadful bear?"

"He is n't a bear," said Vivian. "I thought that he was extremely obliging under the circumstances, did n't you?"

The three elder ladies assented, but with mental reservations.

"Talk about eating crow," muttered Jack Price, as they departed. "I wish I had kept out of the mess; but

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these women are trying to do right, as Vivian says, and it is really a shame to balk them; but the meanest part of it all is, I must go back on Sam."

Then, with a wry face, he laboriously penned "something lovely" for Vivian Everett to read in the "News" that evening:

A MUCH NEEDED REFORM

A misunderstanding seems to have arisen from the tone of a local article in our paper yesterday and the impression given that we were opposed to the Woman's Educational and Industrial Union in the noble efforts of that organization to improve the public schools of Carthage. While we might disagree with them in some of the minor details of their work, as a whole it is admirable. The Board of Education should do all in its power to facilitate their endeavors.

The greater the interest which our refined and cultivated women take in the schools, the better for the schools.

"That will about fill the bill," sighed Price, as he stabbed the editorial on the "hook." "Vivian is probably right, and if I am going to back her up, I want to do it strongly."

The rush was on. It was eleven o'clock, and from that time until one o'clock, a constant stream of copy was pouring in. Item after item passed under the editor's rapid eye. The busy world was whirling before him with

its story of crime and pain, the doings of the humble and the mighty, the prince and the pauper; the world's buyings and its sellings, its feastings and its starvings, its "hatches, matches, and despatches,"—all the varied pictures in the panorama of life. As the big wheel of the world was revolving without, so the little wheel of the "News" staff was whirling within. Price and the men about him, like the players in Hamlet, represented the "chronicles and brief abstract of the times."

Bold headlines, rapid erasures, words substituted here and there for verbose, meaningless sentences, were inserted by the editor's pen, as if by instinct. Something of the force and character of the man, of his vigor and restless energy, was lending his individuality to every line that passed under his eye.

At one o'clock he hurried to the composing room to watch the "make-up." The forms were sent rattling across the rough floor to the elevator and down to the regions below. Then came the whirr and rumble of machinery, shaking the entire fabric of the ramshackle "News" building. Soon it was followed by the strident shriek of the newsboy without; it was done; the first edition of the "Carthage News" was "on the street."


The office was still and empty now. Every one but the editor had gone to lunch. Price, at present, did not spare the time to go out, but always took his lunch with him

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from his home, put up by his mother's own hand: sandwiches which she had sliced and buttered, cake which she had baked and frosted, pie with a crust such as only a New England housewife could create.

Then he leaned back in his chair for a moment, and involuntarily closed his eyes. He was tired, tired, tired. His nerves were gone. His hand trembled, twitched and shook. He aroused himself to stare at his thumb, which had taken on automatic motion. Then he closed his eyes again; tired, given out, — and a day's work yet to be done.

Then he fell into a half-daze as there arose before his mind's eye the vision of a certain restful summer day. The dusty room and paper-cluttered desk, with its shears and paste-pot, had vanished. He seemed to catch a whiff of salt evening air blown across a broad, moonlit arm of the sea. There were stars in the waves and the "tramp-tramp" of a steamer that came soothingly out of the darkness resting on the face of the deep; there it was, suddenly appearing dim in the distance, shapeless, but showing red and green lights like parti-colored eyes. From the penumbral fringe of the shore, lights from the great hotels and the cottages along the ocean road were building long, luminous glides over the gentle rolling swells that rose and fell heavily, the color and consistency of molten lead. There was a warm breath on his cheek,



the ring of a silver laugh; and from out the laugh was builded the vision of a bright face, with golden hair blowing all about it in the night breeze. It was a dream, a sweet, sweet dream!

"Any more copy?" broke in the voice of the foreman.

"Lots of it, presently," answered Jack Price, starting and looking foolish.

So even this rough and ready, fighting, crotchety editor saw his visions and dreamed his dreams. Memory may lapse through a dozen years of sordid days, but for most of us she has some honey of poetry stored, to feed upon in the prosaic winter-times of life.

CHAPTER II

CUPID'S GRADUATE

IT was at Narragansett Pier, in the summer of that year, and while his station in life was still that of an obscure reporter, that Price had fallen a willing victim to the witcheries of the fair Miss Everett.

However much that young lady might have enjoyed displaying her power over the editor, she was inclined to regret her impulsive raid into the purlieus of local journalism. Indeed, Vivian Everett had promised herself, on returning from her summer outing, to do nothing further that could encourage the hopes or the attentions of the young man whose over-ardent admiration had caused her serious misgivings. The fact is, Vivian was drawn towards Price by a sort of remorseful interest, such as an incendiary might take in a conflagration he had ignited.

The girl had been playing with fire, until, alarmed by its fierce heat and brilliant pennants of flame, she had run away to hide her face, trusting that the embers would soon smoulder and die out. Her visit to the "News" office, though apparently harmless and innocent on the surface

of things, was highly imprudent, — if nothing worse, — under the circumstances. Until this year Miss Everett had lived at Carthage for all her twenty-three summers without meeting John Price, or even being aware that there was such a person in existence.

Not only were their spheres of social intercourse wide apart, but their tastes, their opinions, their habits of mind and thought, set them reciprocally at the antipodes. Miss Everett was the daughter of one of the leading capitalists of Carthage, and had been reared to the notion that, though money did not exactly make the man, man must, of necessity, make the money. It was therefore with little interest or curiosity that she had received the following girl-sweetheart letter from her school friend, Electa Chalmers, a charming little thing some years her junior.

HILLCREST, PROVIDENCE,
Monday, June 15

DEAREST VIVY,— It is ages since we met, you but are still a fresh heart-flower of memory. Dearie, I cannot *live* through the summer without you. Next month mamma says I can have a house-party at our Narragansett cottage. *You* must come!

The only trouble is that mamma says I must ask my cousin, John Price, whom you probably know. He is years older than I, and not at all of our set. But mamma says that he only needs a little polish and that we girls should do the

polishing. She seems to take me for an emery wheel. He is the most awkward person that ever came over the pike. If *you* cannot manage him the whole summer is spoiled. Of course Archie Dean will be there, and all the others will be agreeable and interesting. Everything is doing up there, Casino suppers, hotel hops, Country Club luncheons, and lovers' lanes, picturesque and delightfully lonesome, all the way to Point Judith.

I will take no refusal, for I must see your dear face again.

(x x x x x x x x) (Those are kisses.)

Your loving

ELECTA.

"If that is n't the coolest ever," muttered Vivian Everett, "handing her chores over to me as a matter of course! A cousin to be polished, and they expect me to assist in his education! Well, I may want to set up a finishing school for young men some day; it is a long-felt want and would make a hit."

Struck by the humor of this conceit, and with a wide and expanding charity for everything masculine, Vivian wrote: "I am sure that your mother is right, and that we shall find your cousin charming. Never mind the emery wheel; just lay in a good supply of silver polish and we'll brighten him up."

That Mr. Archibald Dean, also of Carthage, should be of the party was quite a matter of course. Archie

Dean always had been a matter of course with Vivian Everett. Her world regarded the gentleman as her personal property, and she had tacitly accepted the situation. As for Dean, he never quite knew whether the girl, who had so long been his good friend and companion, loved him, but he was confident she would marry him "some day or other," and lazily waited until she should be in the humor to name that day.

But Miss Everett was more inclined to find some other "nice girl" to marry Archie, than to wed him herself. As he was her property had she not the right to bestow his heart and hand where she chose? At least, that was her notion, and she had selected Electa Chalmers as the favored recipient. This situation made her more than willing to amuse herself with Electa's cousin, if amusement were to be had; but the task of completing that young man's education, thus good-humoredly undertaken, loomed large when Miss Everett was in due course presented to the "awkward person," to find him a tall fellow of nine and twenty, with grave face, bright eyes, and a determined expression. For the moment she felt very immature and girlish, while her new acquaintance proved unaccustomed to small talk, and plunged at once into a discussion of Carthage politics, from sheer embarrassment.

Price, on his side, could have interviewed the President of the United States without a trace of uneasiness or loss

of self-poise; but this young girl seemed a creature from another world, — as, indeed, she was. It was typical of the ups and downs of human intercourse that, while Price floundered in a prodigious effort to interest and please, fully conscious that nothing he knew of, or could at the moment call to his mind to say, would be apt to do either, Vivian became more at ease and soon felt herself mistress of the situation.

The next morning a merry party of young people set forth for a stroll towards Point Judith lighthouse, Miss Everett allowing herself to be “paired off” with the much dreaded “awkward person” from her home city, though conscious that her progress was being watched from afar by the other members of the party with sly amusement, not untinged with commiseration. This put the girl on her mettle, and the immediate result certainly added to her reputation; for her escort was observed to be both loquacious and extremely attentive.

He was some years older and in every way more mature than any of the gilded youth of the party, with the single exception of Archie Dean, who lazily accepted the situation, whatever he might think of it, and devoted himself to little Miss Chalmers, like an obedient chattel. As the day wore on the young girls stopped smiling at Miss Everett and began to become envious. It was one of those small but gratifying social victories that tended to put Vivian in

high good humor with herself and with her companion, and she soon became so absorbed in its interest that she forgot there was any audience to her little comedy, which is one of the essentials of the highest histrionic art.

But Archie Dean, as he sat on the cliff with Electa, and watched the couple on the rocks close to the water's edge, far below, regarded them with detached amusement, for Vivian coquetted very prettily, and he had made it the only very serious effort of his life to study and understand her.

The less philosophical Miss Chalmers was somewhat piqued. It was n't fair that he should fall into a brown study over Vivian when it was his clear duty to be agreeable to her. "Are n't you dreadfully jealous," she ventured to whisper, at length.

"Me? No. Why?" asked Dean, startled from his reverie and conscious that he was neglectful of his own opportunities. "I should rather enjoy a visitation from the green-eyed monster, just to get a squint at the beast," he added as he collected himself.

"But you're her 'steady,' are n't you?" queried the young girl saucily, as she assumed that air of extreme childishness that sometimes enabled her to say and do things ordinarily inappropriate.

"Oh, nothing as unpoetic as that," he protested. "Vivian conducts a finishing school for young men, you know, and I take an upper classman's interest in the new pupil."

"Do any of her scholars ever graduate?" queried Electa, with a whimsical wistfulness that suddenly struck Dean as very charming.

"Perhaps," he replied, with a light laugh; "seriously, though," he added, "I'm glad you girls have taken Price in hand. He has n't had a fair chance in Carthage, and this sort of thing will do him a lot of good."

"Are you sure?" asked Electa, who had begun to entertain private doubts on the subject.

"Assuredly. He needs the society of just such girls as you, for his life has been a long, hard struggle against adverse conditions — always had his nose right against the grindstone."

"He needs grinding down all over," protested Electa. "I advocated an emery wheel, but Vivian prescribes silver polish."

"How interesting," drawled Dean, "and what would you recommend in my case?"

Electa looked at him shyly out of the corner of her eye. "For you," she murmured, "why, something in the line of electrical applications, don't you know? They put a rubber buzzer to the back of your neck and it makes you jump and jerk and step lively; it's splendid for that tired feeling."

"How painful," laughed Dean, "please don't and I will dance a hornpipe, or pay any other forfeit you

choose to name. How absorbed they are [indicating Price and Miss Everett]; shall I go and throw brick-bats at 'em?"

But Electa would n't listen to the suggestion, so they returned to the cottage to sip tea and gossip with the other members of the party until Vivian Everett and John Price at last returned. Miss Chalmers, thereupon, took her chum up to her room, and demanded, without explanation or preliminary: "However did you do it?"

"Do what?" (innocently).

"Oh, you know well enough. I have seldom been able to get more than three words out of him at a time, and he talked to you like a mill-race. Now don't pretend that you did not know that we were all watching you. We could see you there, below the cliff, sitting on the rocks, looking up at him with those big blue eyes of yours, just as you look at all of them; and he, marching up and down, waving his hands, rumpling his hair, and punching the rocks about him with his stick, as though trying to drill blast holes in them. I never saw John Price so excited since I stole his algebra and threw it in the mill-pond."

"What did he do?" queried Miss Everett, irrelevantly.

"Tweaked my nose and told me I would never grow bigger than Knee-high-miah."

"That was n't so ferocious; I thought you were going to say he threw you in after it," laughed her friend.

"Oh, Jack was never rough like that, but he always treats me like a small child; it's terribly mortifying. I'm glad you like him. I was afraid you'd find him slow. But tell me, dear, how in the world did you do it?"

"My child," observed Miss Everett, sagely, "when you are as old as I am you will know that a man can always be made to talk to you about things in which he is really interested."

"But suppose you do not care for the things he is interested in?"

"It is n't at all a question of what you care for. What you want is to have him care for you."

"Vivian, mamma says you are going to be a dreadful coquette."

Miss Everett smiled. She fancied she had already "arrived"; but she only said: "Indeed?"

But neither of these two giddy girls had any conception of what those two blissful hours of communion with a sympathetic soul had meant to the young man whose life had been passed chiefly in the company of fellow bread-winners, and who had known little of the charm of social intercourse.

More or less uncouth, profoundly ignorant of feminine guile, Price was as intense, as sincere, and as soberly in earnest as any of his stern Puritan grandsires, of whom, by the bye, he was immensely proud. He rejoiced that a

Price had fought at Marston Moor, that a Price had defended the Medfield block-house against the Indians, that one grandsire had died on Breed's Hill, and another at Lundy's Lane, that his own grandfather had charged at Chapultepec, and his father at Gettysburg. Yes, there was fighting blood in the veins of John Price, and deep in his soul he cherished the pride of race. Vivian would have been vastly astonished had she known that neither her wealth nor her beauty had been so attractive to this young man, in the first instance, as the fact that she was a Massachusetts Everett.

In truth, Price was a new species of the sex to this young lady, who had undertaken to "complete his education" with such good-humored thoughtlessness. She was too young and too gentle to be, as yet, a heartless coquette, but her interest in Price was rather to be classed as a sort of scientific inquisitiveness, at the outset. He seemed to take everything she said so seriously, was so intensely in earnest about trifles, or about things she had always regarded as trifles, that she longed to hear him make love to her.

She was sure that would prove a novel sensation, — and probably she was quite right about it.

CHAPTER III

"THERE IS A TIDE"

ARCHIE DEAN had rather expected that the Chalmers house party might culminate in his engagement to Miss Vivian Everett. It therefore piqued him that Vivian should see fit so deftly to slip through his fingers. He had been out-manceuvred; but he was, *par excellence*, a philosopher, and the complications and contradictions of the feminine mind constituted his peculiar specialty in psychology.

Meanwhile the education of John Price was progressing rapidly and satisfactorily to all parties concerned. As Miss Everett had decreed that Archibald Dean should marry Electa Chalmers, — or at least, so pretended to herself, to Electa, and to her laggard lover, — she had both leisure and inclination for a mild, mid-summer flirtation with the tall young man whose brown eyes and earnest face she found very attractive. Thus it was that this man from Vulcan and this girl from an adjoining planet were sounding one another and striving to find a common language. What more natural than that the *lingua Franca* of the heart should prove the most adaptable?

Almost before she was aware of it, Vivian found herself absorbed in the interest of that greatest of all games wherein she was by nature and education an expert, as yet lacking the cool precision of a woman of the world, but gifted with a knack of sympathy calculated to arouse the best latent impulses of the men with whom she was thrown in contact, though she did not herself appreciate the talent, or realize the more dangerous consequences of its exercise.

It was small wonder, therefore, that John Price was led, by the smiles of Miss Everett, to confide his hopes and ambitions, his opinions and prejudices, and the deep, abiding principles of life and conduct to which he pinned his faith, to the ear of this young and lovely woman, listening with evident interest, understanding, admiration, while he told her of his highest aims, — how he hoped to be the editor of his own paper one day, free to express his opinions without fear of the counting-room or favor of the advertiser. What more delightful inducement could a young man of chivalrous instincts require to spur him on to highest endeavor along his chosen walk in life?

Nor, during those bright summer days, those dear summer days, of blue sky and blue sea and swirling, rock-torn breakers, did he confine himself wholly to practical topics and "shop." He told Miss Everett of his

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boyhood home in Medfield, where the Prices had lived, father and son, since the days of King Philip's war, and of the sturdy, homely folk who dwelt there long before continental immigrants began to settle on the deserted Massachusetts acres. He told her of raking cranberries and mowing tall, coarse grasses in the broad, mysterious meadows of the crooked Charles; of long, lazy afternoons, under the pines of a lonely hill, which whispered messages across the somnolent ether in nature's wireless code; of a secret retreat, in the fastnesses of a brook where slept a peaceful spring, surrounded by granite walls, decked with blueberries that grew big on low bushes thereabout: "where all the sweet, wild things abound that shun the haunts of pride," he said.

"A fit retreat for Oberon and Titania," suggested Miss Everett.

"For Oberon, perhaps, but we shall have to bar out Titania. She, like too many women, was enamoured of a man with an ass's head, and did n't have the perception to see the difference."

"Do you imagine we are all like that? Surely some girls recognize a man, a real man, when they have the rare good fortune to meet one," languished Vivian.

"Of course they do," he admitted, "such women make the world brighter and better, — are worth fighting for, dying for!"

"Splendid," applauded Miss Everett, beginning to find things interesting. The "awkward person" talked well, and the girl was impelled by the inquisitive desire to hear him make love to her. Thoughtless rather than heartless, she drew him on.

"Girls do not often find a man of that sort in these degenerate days," she sighed, with a side glance that was distinctly "fetching." Vivian's flirtatious airs were pretty to see, however reprehensible.

"The woods are full of them, if girls only look in the right place," asserted Price.

"Oh, a girl does n't wander through the woods seeking a champion in these practical times," laughed Vivian, as she hummed a verse from the old glee:

"Roving beneath the moon's soft light,
Or in the thick, embowering shade,
Listening the tale, with dear delight
Of the wandering sylvan maid."

"I fear I do not know much about girls of any sort," confessed Price.

"But surely you have an ideal woman; tell me about her," urged Vivian, on mischief bent.

"My ideal woman? It is hard, very hard to put her into words," he mused thoughtfully, looking not at Vivian, but out over the sea, thousands of miles afar. "Do you

know, Miss Everett," he continued, "my ideal woman must fit the spot of which we were speaking; she must know wild flowers, and the daintiness of wild flowers; she must love trees, and the solemnity of them; she must be something to reverence, to speak to tenderly, to touch gently, to cherish carefully through the frosts and storms of life."

"Must she know how to cook?" (saucily).

"Of course, if necessary."

"And wash and iron?"

"I see you are making fun of me," smiled the dreamer, with grave good humor, "but I was talking of my ideal woman. I suppose she has been pieced together out of idle fancies, humanized, made into flesh and blood, by the image of the one good and beautiful woman I have known very intimately."

"Who was she?" (jealously).

"My mother."

"Of course, how stupid of me. But you can hardly expect to find a young girl with all the wisdom of your mother, and all the dainty coyness of a woodland nymph."

"Surely not. My ideal woman might not suit me at all, even if I could find her. I should much prefer a real woman who could love me and whom I could reverence and cherish. She would doubtless be immature and girlish, 'not too wise and not too good, for human nature's daily food.'"

Vivian felt that this last description fitted her much more closely, but all this had been rather too impersonal to be very exciting; he was quite shy and clearly required more obvious encouragement, so she made another cast with her fly: "You expect a good deal of us," she murmured; "but, with it all, you do not seem to care how we look." Certainly she looked a charming Circe, — and she knew she was very naughty.

"To tell the truth, I have never given the subject a thought," he returned, with a frank, boyish laugh, taking his eyes from the sea and turning their solemn brown depths full upon her merry blue ones, a change of base very satisfactory to the young lady.

"Well, it is high time you did, sir" (with a glance of half real, half simulated tenderness). "Tell me, now, should she be light or dark?"

"I really do not know," debating, with transparent artfulness; "yes, clearly, light, of course."

"And her hair, — should it be red or yellow?"

"Not red, certainly, though mother's hair had an auburn tinge; but still, I'll vote for yellow."

"And her eyes, blue or green?"

"Clearly, blue, of course."

"And should she be plain or beautiful?"

"Beautiful, certainly."

"Alas, then it can never be, for I am plain," with a

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sigh. That was an unusual cfudity for Vivian Everett; but John Price was absolutely raw material, and the best kind of practice.

"No," he cried, "you are beautiful, as lovely as this bright day, this fresh wind, those clear blue waves, that radiant, sun-lit cloud; this is the happiest day of my life for in it I have found — you!" and he looked into her face with intense admiration.

"Yes," whispered Vivian; "and I have found you; we have found each other. Is it not wonderful? You have told me of new things, true things, tender things, — I shall remember them all my life."

And that was her punishment, — for she did!

So they walked together, hand in hand, under the salt sun of Point Judith, by the side of the thundering surf; scrambling over wild rocks, as the waves hissed about them, peeping into tide-fed pools where pink star-fish ambled, amid miniature forests of sea-weed; the young man, self-reliant, strong of body, and conscious also of soul strength, trustful in himself, and trustful also of his companion, whom he fondly believed to be the embodiment of all that was lovely in Heaven and upon earth; and the young woman, happy in her pride of conquest, though somewhat conscience-stricken withal, as she ranged about the rocks, playing with the wild breakers and strong tide, as she played with human power and passion, be-

lieving herself safe upon the firm shore and blind to the engulfing arms of destiny.

"We would better say nothing about it just yet. These people need not know, everything would be spoiled if they did," she said, a few days later, while they sat in the moonlight on the bluff.

John Price had no objection to offer. The secret delight in her was too sweet and sacred to be shared with any one as yet, he thought. Meanwhile he drank deeply from the nectar-cup of love. Vivian liked the way in which he touched her hair and kissed her hand. There was something courtly and old-fashioned about this youth of nine and twenty, in spite of his uncouth bearing and lack of social opportunity, — and he seemed so boyish in his immature experience of wooing women.

The girl mentally compared him with the young men of her previous acquaintance, including that unemotional philosopher, Mr. Archibald Dean, not at all to the disadvantage of her unsophisticated lover, and began to feel twinges of remorse at her imprudence. In point of fact, she now realized that what she had done could scarcely be called by as charitable a name, and being by nature womanly and tenderhearted, the bitterest regrets and self-upbraidings beset her, which she sought to subdue by the promise, addressed to her accusing better self, that she would never play at love again, or otherwise seek to complete a young man's education.

"It will all be over as soon as we return to Carthage," she assured herself, with mental pledges to "be good forever after."

They were taking a final walk along the rocks and in sound of the breakers, which at night lose all the grace of sunlight, and loom sullen, shaggy monsters of the deep. As they stood, looking across the silver-fretted moonglide, while the salt breeze blew fresh in their faces, a thrill suddenly swept through the girl and bore her quite out of herself.

As she looked up into that strong face, now softened by infinite tenderness, and into those deep brown eyes that seemed to glow with electrical fires of suppressed emotion, she felt drawn towards him by irresistible impulse, though he barely touched her. Somehow, in that silence, so full of soul-communion, they seemed to have grown to know and understand one another, to find new delights of sympathy and companionship. Nearer and nearer drew their faces, there in the moonlit dusk; and as John Price looked down upon her upturned face, it seemed very fair, and sweet, and good to look upon.

"Little wood-violet," he whispered, and, bending down, touched her lips with his, — no more; yet the strong man trembled as he did this thing, and the wind swept in from off the deep, and sang strange sea-melodies about them. With a revulsion of maiden shame and confusion,

as swift as her emotional impulse, Vivian rushed back to the cottage, with her heart beating wildly, — ran through the throng of young people gathered about the piano in the big room, with its log fire blazing brightly, where they were singing "Auld Lang Syne," in a chorus of fresh young voices; stumbled up the stairway to her little room in the gable, where she sought her mirror, and gazed fixedly for some time at the reflection of her own flushed face.

"Vivian Everett," she said, shaking her finger at the girl in the mirror, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself, and I am ashamed of you!"

CHAPTER IV

THE MAN IN LINCOLN GREEN

THE feline in the feminine had never come to the comprehension of John Price. That a woman can be in love with love from early girlhood, play with it, torment and torture it, affect it when she had it not, possess it and conceal it, dream of it by night and day, think it, breathe it, live constantly in its presence, endow commonplace men with its transfiguring illumination, and yet find common clay but common clay on near inspection, — all this was quite beyond his conception.

That a girl might find intense interest and emotional gratification in mere sport with fire divine, he could not, in the nature of things, understand; and perhaps it is well that this was so. But he had not lived in this world for twenty-nine years, enduring more than his fair share of its buffets and scorns, without acquiring due perception of its standards. ~~When~~ he had first met Vivian Everett she had come as a revelation to him. His life had been passed among men, largely among the rough and uncultivated. His mother was almost the only woman of

refinement who had come very near to him, for his Chalmers cousins, though kindly disposed, lived in the far east and were many years his juniors. In fact, it was his Aunt Chalmers who had first interfered in his behalf socially, at the instance of his mother, now that Electa was old enough to give him what he so much needed.

So it fell about that Electa had been called upon to use her "emery wheel." That Vivian Everett should pass her time with him, that she should think him worth while talking to even for a little while at a summer resort, had at first filled him with delight and surprise. The sense that he had hitherto been shut out from the society of refined and cultivated women had always seemed to him as an unmerited wrong, and touched his soul with some bitterness. Scarcely had he thus come to realize that he was, for the first time, on a free and equal footing with a young woman who breathed the same social atmosphere as his mother, when he found himself deeply, passionately in love with her. That she should seem to respond to his affection for an instant he was too large-minded to attribute to any guile on her part.

She might be his, he reasoned, if he could win a place for himself in the world which he could decently ask such a woman to share. In the vernacular she had "put it up to him." In his view, that was the obligation he had assumed as the aftermath of the Narragansett visit. He

certainly did not at all realize that Vivian might now be suffering the pangs of stricken conscience. He was, in fact, not at all sure that he himself had done what was right in permitting her so to compromise herself under the circumstances.

On the other hand, he suddenly felt a consciousness of power that he had never previously known. There were barriers between them that he felt the might to batter down. Prospects which had before seemed out of the question suddenly dawned upon his horizon to beckon him on. Other men had risen from life's ranks, even without such a heritage as his own to place and power. Why not he? He knew himself already by far the superior of men who possessed the *entrée* to the home of the Everetts, and he deeply resolved that what talents and resources he possessed should be devoted to climbing from his world into hers. As to the ultimate result he had none of the doubts and fears that disturbed Vivian, — had he not read her soul in her eyes that night?

And it now seemed that chance favored him in his newly aroused determination. The uncrowned king of Carthage, Thomas Evans, hatter and furrier, devoted husband, fond father, unscrupulous politician, was enjoying an outing at Narragansett Pier at the time of the Chalmers house party. Fresh of face, dapper of dress, always appearing as though he had just stepped out of a Turkish bath into

a new suit of clothes, he levied contributions upon the rich that he might give unto the poor, — a form of brigandage popular with the masses since the ancient days of Robin Hood. He it was who found places and homes for the widow's orphaned children, who visited the sick in his district with greater assiduity and practical helpfulness than any clergyman or social settlement worker, who forced through costly public improvements that starving workmen might have bread, who found sinecures for young men that they might earn their way through college, who crushed political opposition with an iron hand, and nominated to office the representatives of the people, from coroner and inspector of elections to mayor and congressman. For a man to achieve practical success in a city so governed without "seeing Tom Evans" was out of the question.

But Price, with all his sturdy independence, rather liked this philanthropic anomaly. Every reform movement organized to oppose the "machine" — and Carthage had seen many such — was composed of unpractical, well-meaning citizens at the top, and the off-scourings of the Evans organization at the bottom. Every man too bad for Tom Evans longed for his downfall and suddenly turned "reformer."

It was fate, perhaps, that sent this powerful personage to Narragansett just at the close of the reporter's holiday.

His chief had wired Price to ascertain from Evans whether Congressman Parkerson was to be renominated that fall,—for it was Evans, and Evans alone, who sent Representatives to Washington. The other two hundred thousand people in the city of Carthage awaited his determination with indolent curiosity.

So Price, quite in the ordinary course of business, tore himself away from the side of Miss Everett for an hour or so, waited upon the “easy boss,” and asked him for the desired information: “Would Congressman Parkerson be returned?”

“No,” said Evans, as they sat on the broad veranda of the hotel, “Parkerson is disloyal. There was a poor old rheumatic I wanted to have put in as deputy in the customs house, but Parkerson gave me a long lecture on civil service reform. He has n’t a red corpuscle in his whole system. I told him I would take care of the civil service end of it if he would recommend the appointment. Well, that man threw out his chest, waved his hand from a pinnacle of lofty virtue, and said he ‘could n’t countenance such practices.’ Old Neubauer is forced to receive help from the Poor Department while Colonel Parkerson goes to Europe; but he won’t go back to Congress, you can have that straight tip from me, Mr. Price; he won’t go back to Congress.” Evans had a square, bull-dog jaw, and his blue eyes were cold and had a steely glitter;

but these *indicia*, that might have betrayed his inner self to the world without, were seldom observable, as his habitual expression was a bland smile.

"I suppose the colonel was sincere in his objection to any manipulation of the civil service regulations," suggested Price.

"What concern was that of his?" demanded Evans. "As you know, the commission is loyal; they would have taken care of Neubauer and have done what was right, if it had n't been for the punctillos of that self-righteous money-bag."

"It was hard on Neubauer," admitted Price, amused at Evans's moral view-point, in asserting that the commission was "loyal" and would do what was "right."

"But what sickened me was the virtuous air the old Pharisee assumed to me," continued the disgusted politician, "after the infamous way in which he bought his nomination. Why, the fashion in which he poured his good money into the sewers was a crime, a downright sin and shame. The Bleeker people were just as bad, or worse, and it was fat pickings for the heelers, who have not yet recovered from the general demoralization that followed in consequence. I did all I could to check it, and when it came to my own district I simply had to put a stop to the business. I could n't afford to have my good boys ruined like that. Bleeker undertook to carry the Seventh Ward

with five thousand dollars in good hard money. Parkerson wanted to raise the ante and put up ten thousand, but I would n't have it. I said: 'No, sir, if you want any further help from me in this campaign you won't spend one penny in the Seventh Ward. If I can't carry it against Bleeker and his five thousand dollars without such wicked waste of the sinews of war, I'll quit politics. Keep out of the Seventh with your dirty stuff is all I ask.'"

"As I remember it, you kept your promise with little difficulty," observed Price.

"Yes, and I taught both those purse-proud fellows a much-needed lesson, into the bargain," rejoined Evans, his cheek fairly aglow with a genuine virtuous indignation. "As soon as Bleeker had tapped his barrel I sent Billy Reilly — you know Billy, smooth as goose-grease — and Don Driscoll, the most plausible liar unhung, to old Joe Reibling, who had the handling of the Bleeker wad in the Seventh. They told Reibling they had broken with me and were ready to come over to Bleeker and work the ward for him, assuring him they could deliver the delegation with ease. They got thirty-five hundred out of the five thousand. Reibling kept the rest for his trouble. We paid for all our carriages and workers out of Bleeker's own cash, and carried the caucus in a walk-away. After all that, think of Parkerson putting on robes of spotless white and prating to me of civil service reform! But

his public career is ended. I'll take care of that, Mr. Price."

"Will Parkerson go into the caucuses, or take his medicine?" asked the journalist.

"Oh, he won't fight, he knows better. I notified him to retire gracefully, and he will plead failing health. If Everett and his Carthage Electric Company come to terms, I'll put him in, — otherwise some other silk-stocking."

"How about Jimmy McIntyre?"

"No, the State Senate is Jimmy's limit; he is a useful man and clever, but he lacks education. We have to send men of larger calibre to Congress," announced the cultured ruler of Carthage and Hampshire County!

"Parkerson must find the 'News' stock a burden if he is to retire; it has never paid dividends," suggested Price, his heart beating wildly, as he made the apparently casual observation.

"I have agreed to take it off his hands, or find some one else to do it. I could n't afford to leave the 'News' in such control. They would lay in wait for me and sandbag me some day."

"That interests me," observed Price. "Naturally, I have some curiosity as to my future employer."

"Why don't you buy the paper yourself?" queried Evans, keenly. He had long had his eye on this young

man as one who might some day serve his purpose, if rightly handled.

Price's cheek glowed with hope and high anticipation. It meant everything to him, but he managed to hold himself in check. He felt the necessity of avoiding the exhibition of undue eagerness. "Better never rise at all; better forego all thought of Vivian Everett than to sell myself body and soul to a man like Thomas Evans," was his thought.

"It is possible that I might be able to make the purchase of the stock, if it could be done on very easy terms, but I should risk all I have in what has always been a losing venture."

"But you have a knowledge of the town and a practical experience in the business that is worth more than cash," urged the politician, anxious to unload the stock on some one.

"I might venture it," conceded Price, "and perhaps I could manage to make it pay after a couple of years of hard work, always providing I was n't tied up too closely to any faction or special interest." The young man was more than anxious for Evans's assistance, but unwilling to pay the tribute of utter subservience which he feared the "boss" would demand as a *sine qua non*.

But, in truth, the politician was in a sore quandary. The "News" had already cost Parkerson more than Evans

cared to lose in any business venture. On the other hand, the Congressman had agreed to retire from public life without a contest provided the "News" stock were disposed of on terms which would let him out without serious loss.

"I would be glad to give you a chance, young man," said Evans, meditatively, "and I appreciate your position; but I don't need to tie you hand and foot. You and I will have no difficulty in getting along together. All I want to know is how you stand on the street railway franchise question?"

"I am unalterably opposed to its renewal," said Price quickly, "and am prepared to fight the steal tooth and nail." He knew that Evans was at odds with the Bleeker faction who controlled the railroad. That was his one hope. For the time being Thomas Evans was on the right side of the municipal question of the hour, and might be expected to welcome such help as a man like Price could give him.

"That is our position, also," returned Evans, thinking rapidly. He knew men to the core; that was his business. He bought them and sold them, traded in them and on them. "The one error a politician cannot afford to make," he often said, "is to mistake a man's character." That was his philosophy of politics in a nutshell. He was well aware that John Price could not be bought, or long

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held in leading-strings; but, on the other hand, he could be placed under obligations of good feeling and gratitude, and made very useful on occasion. Though he could not be swerved or bent from a purpose once undertaken, he might be broken, if necessary, when the time came.

In the present crisis of affairs at Carthage the "boss!" happened to require the services of some bold and able man to oppose the unscrupulous corporation he was endeavoring to humble, — and bleed, if you please. The Carthage Electric Company had ignored his request for campaign contributions, and even had had the impudence to run its president, Robert Bleeker, for Congress, in opposition to Colonel Parkerson, nominally, but in fact, for the purpose of disrupting the Evans machine and driving Thomas Evans from politics. This attempt had failed egregiously; but the Carthage Electric Company must be punished, scourged, mulcted, ruined, or whipped into abject submission. That was the purpose of Thomas Evans, and in John Price he saw a bloodhound to unleash upon his powerful enemy. Should the corporation come to terms later, he knew he might have some trouble to "call off his dog" but he had a master's scornful disregard of this possible difficulty.

So it came to pass, in the course of the next few weeks, that Colonel Parkerson announced his retirement from

Congress on the score of "ill health"; a more pliable, "loyal" man, with "red corpuscles" in his veins, was slated to take his place. Neubauer, the helpless rheumatic, ceased to receive help from the Poor Department for himself and his wife and large family of children and became a self-respecting deputy in the customs house, through a flagrant violation of the civil service regulations; and John Price became editor, and, for the time being, at least, the proprietor of the "News," as part of the "deal," with no other positive and well defined pledge or obligation on his part than to meet the terms of payment on the stock, and to fight the Carthage Electric Company. These terms of payment were hard, — unfairly oppressive, in fact; for Evans wanted a hold on the young fellow, whereby he could crush him at will. At best, John Price, from a business point of view, had but a bare fighting chance; for the "News" was a weak and struggling paper that had always lost money and tottered on the verge of bankruptcy, while the Carthage Electric Company was one of the wealthiest and most powerful corporations that had ever fastened its throttling grip upon a municipality.

Meanwhile, Thomas Evans smiled upon his customers in his hat and fur store, visited the sick and afflicted in his ward, and watched the mischief he had thus set afoot, confidently awaiting the hour of triumph when the Car-

thane Electric directors should come to him on bended knee to beg his assistance and pay abundantly, as the Lowland shepherds paid blackmail to Rob Roy, or as the Sheriff of Nottingham enriched the coffers of the men in Lincoln green of Sherwood Forest.

None the less, there was some kindliness, helpfulness, good-will, on the part of Thomas Evans toward John Price, and more than a little gratitude and regard in the heart of Price for Evans. The young man had been given the first chance of his life through this recognition of his ability and worth on the part of the politician. It is in ties of this sort that strong men and true find their greatest temptations and most bitter regrets; but Price, with all his ideals and high principles knew enough to be aware that a man cannot get a start in life and be utterly unpractical. To accomplish anything in the world he knew that compromise in detail was often essential, and often right where the underlying principle was not sacrificed. "He who would be captain of none but honest men would have small hire to pay."

When his mother cautioned him quietly against a dubious alliance with a man of Thomas Evans's unscrupulous reputation and non-moral standing and standards, the young editor replied: "Dr. Johnson once said: 'Harry Hervey was a vicious man, but very kind to me. If you call a dog "Hervey" I shall love him.' So it is with me,

mother. Thomas Evans may be a vicious man, and may be not; but if you call a dog 'Thomas Evans' I shall love him."

And so began the struggle, the desperate wrestle with fate against long odds, in which we see the young editor engaged. To win in this battle of the pen, — no less fierce and dangerous, no less earnest and strong, than a battle of the sword, no less full of bleeding hearts and scarred and wounded lives, — John Price devoted all his powers of mind and body, all his strength of soul. To him the appearance of Vivian Everett in the "News" office was like the unrolling of the heavens, as a scroll, with angelic vision. It was for her, always for her he fought, with the stern enthusiasm, perhaps the fanaticism of his Puritan forebears; and because of this, his fight must, of necessity, be under the banner of honor, and with the tongue of truth, with crest untarnished and head unbowed by shame.

Other men might buy and sell to win place and power, manipulate the markets, form corporations on paper, like over-grown bubbles, and turn their worthless securities into cash before the inevitable catastrophe, build huge fortunes on the wreck of confiding investors and the misery of the widow and the orphan, fleece the world's lambs, to whom the Lord is said to temper the winds of adversity; he, John Price, would found his fortune upon the corner-

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stone of honor, and build it on the rock of pride, that it might stand as a monument for his children, — for hers! if God should bless him.

Such was the love and such the ambition of John Price.

CHAPTER V

A JILT BY PROXY

ON her return to Carthage from her Narragansett visit, Vivian Everett resumed her customary occupations and amusements, while endeavoring to put out of her mind the events of her summer by the sea and all that pertained thereto. Her social instinct told her that John Price, an obscure and penniless reporter on the staff of the "Carthage News," was quite out of the question from a matrimonial point of view, however much he might have interested or attracted her. She now lived in the dread that, owing to her own folly, John Price would seek to pursue the intimacy in their home city, and vaguely wondered just how she should meet the situation without offence to the Chalmers family, who knew nothing of the social situation at Carthage, — and without also standing convicted at the bar of her own conscience as a heartless coquette. If it had n't been for her thoughtless imprudence she might even have lent the young journalist friendly aid, in a social way, but now she had spoiled all that, and felt that she would be ready to sink through the floor,

should she see Price coming up the steps of her front door. But he caused her no such embarrassment as she had anticipated. She had failed to appreciate either his knowledge of the world or his supersensitive pride; but as the weeks went by and she heard nothing of him, she began to be piqued at his apparent indifference, with a feminine inconsistency she found it hard to explain to herself; for Vivian Everett had suddenly become introspective in mood and worried about herself and the whole situation until she became absent-minded and dreamily *distract*. It was while she was enveloped in this peculiar atmosphere that her father began talking at the breakfast table, one morning, about a rising young journalist named Price, mentioning him, incidentally, as the new editor and proprietor of the "News," and a coming power in Carthage politics.

"If I remember rightly, Archie Dean knows the Prices," remarked Mrs. Everett, whose *forte* in life was to keep posted as to "who knows who."

"You interest me," said her husband, eagerly.

"He tells me they lost their money in the panic of 1872-73, and since then have been wretchedly poor. The family was once well-known in Massachusetts, but I have altogether lost track of them of late years," returned his wife, not, of course, intending to imply that she had lost track of the Prices because they had lost

their money, but stating two distinct facts, not necessarily correlated.

"It might be just as well for you to make the acquaintance of Mrs. Price," remarked Everett, thoughtfully. "The young man is making trouble for us in the matter of this street railroad franchise, and I must find some way of bringing influence to bear upon him."

Vivian felt her color rising, and made an excuse to leave the table. Not for the wealth of the world would she permit her father to suspect that his daughter already possessed considerable influence with the young and ardent editor of the "Carthage News." She could not be at all sure that she would not, in that case, be asked to use her influence,—of course without committing or compromising herself; for Everett was not over nice in business matters, and Vivian was struggling to reinstate herself in her own self-respect.

She was astonished, puzzled, almost frightened, to learn that the young journalist had leaped at one bound from the lowest rung of the ladder to the top of his chosen profession. If her father feared him, or wished to use him, John Price must be making money, much money; that was what filled her with vague fear. How could she justify to John Price, rich, her treatment of John Price, poor? If he should ever surmise how flippantly she had dealt with him, how she had amused herself with his intense

earnestness and high-souled sincerity, if he should guess the wretched truth, or half of it, he would crush any fondness for her, as he would combat a disease. Well, why should she care? She hardly knew, but care she did, none the less. Had he not told her that he had been given new ambition and purpose by his love? This man loved strongly, Vivian knew that, and the apparent early fulfilment of his boast startled and appalled her. If he should win his way, if he should be successful in the world, and come to stand at Carthage as he had on the rocks of Narragansett, upon equal terms with her, what could she say? How could she free herself from the unquestionable obligation? What wretchedness was in store for them both in consequence of her vanity and folly?

These were the vague heart-questionings that beset her with alternate remorse and dread, for, as the problem closed in upon her, she realized that this was not at all the sort of man her fancy had pictured as the ultimate husband. She did n't love him, — not the least bit, — of that she was positive; but she was afraid of him, and yet was attracted to him. It was in this state of mind she had accompanied her mother and the delegation of club-women who had waited upon the young editor on behalf of their movement to alter the public school curriculum. Vivian came away from this imprudent excur-

sion much more agitated and disturbed than before. Her father was right. Price was fast becoming a power in the community. That much at least she had learned as a result of the morning's adventure.

Vivian had now become so impressed with the rapid rise of Price and the trouble such advance in the world on his part threatened to her peace of mind, that she determined to consult her faithful chattel, Archie Dean, whom she had so calmly handed over as a present to her friend Electa Chalmers.

It was on one of those soft, early October days that Archie sauntered up the lawn, tennis racket in hand. He had come for one last bout on the court, and stayed to be drawn into a talk over Vivian's emotional quandary.

"You know I saw a good deal of Mr. Price at Narragansett," began Vivian.

"So I observed," replied the chattel,—who, by the way, was an attorney and counsellor at law, and one that might have been an ornament to his profession, had he not been too lazy. A laggard in love, and every other walk of life, Archie Dean was none the less a man of parts, and could be very entertaining when he half tried.

"He seems to have begun to make his mark here," pursued Vivian.

"Why should n't he? So deucedly energetic — must have acquired sudden impulse from some quarter unknown. What did you do to wake him up so, Vivian?"

"I'm sure I wish I knew," said the girl, half wistfully. "I'd try the same receipt on you instantly!"

"Don't, please don't," pleaded the chattel, in affected alarm.

"If you would only bestir yourself and amount to something, Archie!"

"What shall I do?" he asked, with the suggestion of a yawn that was distinctly exasperating. "Get elected to the legislature, run for Congress, try for the golf championship, elope with an actress, become a railroad president, or write a book?"

"I only wish you really were enterprising enough to elope with an actress," she exclaimed; "it would be so interesting."

"I was merely trying to obtain your point of view," observed Dean, a trifle nettled. "You don't object to what I do so much as the way in which I do it, if I correctly interpret your highly moral advice. Now if I went through the world, steam-engine fashion, puffing and blowing and tooting a whistle, after the manner of our mutual friend, I suppose you would think more of me?"

"Oh, it would n't suit you at all, but there is some

happy medium in the long range between a locomotive and a tortoise."

"The proposition is self-evident," acknowledged Dean.

"Is Mr. Price really a locomotive?"

"Something of the sort,— in a nice way, of course, I mean."

"Kind and considerate and would n't run over anybody, I suppose."

"You have the notion."

"And you think he will be successful?"

"What do you mean by success?" evaded Dean, mentally noting the fact that Vivian wished to talk of the editor instead of the reformation of her chattel's character, which had long been a threadbare theme.

"To care for something with your whole soul, fight for it strongly, and win it bravely and honestly," cried the girl, with sudden fervor; yet she liked Archie Dean, with all his deficiencies. She was beginning almost to dislike John Price, — she thought.

"Is n't it dreadfully warm weather to get stirred up like that?" queried the chattel, holding up his tennis racket as an ineffectual shade to the long rays of the glowing autumnal sun.

Vivian laughed. Then she grew suddenly sober and sighed gently. "Archie, I don't know what I would do

without you. When you come I feel relaxed, and all nervous tension evaporates."

"Take me for a rest cure some day," said Dean, with a whimsical tenderness all his own. He understood her, never took her too seriously, never excited her or overestimated her. Why could n't she marry him? He would surely make her happy.

"When we reach Nirvana we shall enjoy each other," was her reply. There was a moment's silence. Then she said: "Electa is coming soon. You must be very nice to her."

"You really wish it?" asked Dean, soberly.

"Yes," said Vivian, without hesitation, though feeling that she was burning all her bridges behind her, — for, intuitively she was aware that it was one of the turning points of her life.

"I'll try to do as I am bid," said Archie Dean. Then he sat erect and looked squarely into Vivian's blue eyes that grew large with wonder at his sudden earnestness, as he said: "That man means to marry you, Vivian, whether you will or no. He will do it, unless you marry me, and will probably make you miserable; for, though he is a fine fellow, you and he are too different in every way ever to be well mated."

"Nonsense," said Vivian, with heightened color, "where did you get such a wild idea?"

"Truth," asserted Dean; "he is a perfect giant of stored up energy, a dynamo fed from the human Niagara that rages under the flimsy bridge of our whole social fabric. Look out for him, Vivian; beware of yourself!"

"Why do you talk so? It is n't like you, Archie," faltered the girl, with real terror in her eyes.

"No, it is n't like me," he acknowledged. "I don't care for very much in life but you, and I cannot win your love. I have known it, we both have known it for some time, though I rather thought you would marry me one day without it. It has taken the tuck out of me, Vivian. I am a man of the world and sha'n't die of unrequited affection. You have tried to love me."

"You know all my thoughts, Archie, before they are formed in my own mind. You understand me thoroughly, have sounded the gamut of my moods and tenses, — but I can't, — can't, — can't."

"I know, I understand," replied Archie, with a sigh. "John Price acquired a greater hold upon your spiritual and emotional being in two weeks than I have secured in fifteen years. How is it going to end, Vivian?"

"That is what I have been asking myself, Archie," said the girl, feeling great comfort in being able to lean upon some one in her dilemma. "I thought to amuse myself with him; he was so untrained and so terribly in earnest, so crude, yet so large-minded. I pretended to

be interested in things I never cared to read about or talk about before, just to draw him on; and then, before I fully realized what it all meant, I found that he loved me in a way a woman ought to be proud to be loved, and it made me ashamed of myself, heartsick at my vanity and unworthiness. He is fighting, struggling, overcoming stupendous obstacles for me. I feel it. I know it. Father has spoken of the way he is coming to the front, so have you, so has every one. And yet I will not, cannot love him, or — or — marry him; it is altogether out of the question. I agree with you on that point entirely. But what can I do? What can I say? I can't go to him and plead with him not to struggle, not to fight, not to raise himself in the world. I must n't take the inspiration away from him, must I? He told me he was going to mount the ladder of fame; that I was his Polar star, and all that sort of thing. I did not pay much attention at the time, for I had heard something like it before."

"Not from me, at least," observed Mr. Archibald Dean, with shrug of shoulder.

"I'll give you credit for that, Archie, not from you certainly; but there *have* been others" (with a *mouse*).

"Doubtless, energetic gentlemen, with high ideals and big talk, who go up like a rocket and come down like a stick; but Price is a fellow of another sort. You

could n't stop that man with a club, even if you wished to."

"But I can keep him out of my life, can't I?" asked the girl, almost desperately.

"You can try," replied the rejected suitor, chattel, and confidant.

"I have it!" exclaimed Vivian, with a smile of triumph. "You can go to him and explain things."

"Explain what?"

"Why, that it is n't any use and that he must n't think, must n't suppose, must n't imagine, and, —and all that, you understand."

"It is as clear as mud," observed the chattel.

"Why don't you be nice?" pleaded Vivian, with a look she knew to be irresistible.

"And go to John Price to say that he must n't think, suppose, imagine, that Vivian Everett can ever return his love? What will the man reply?"

"Well, what do you suppose?" asked Vivian, knitting her brows.

"He will probably tell me, in the vigorous English of which he has such an extended vocabulary, that it is none of my infernal business, and show me the door. I shall only have made myself ridiculous, and all to no purpose. I don't think much of that splendid idea of yours, Vivian."

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"Oh, it will be all right, if you do it tactfully as only you know how to do things. You must try, anyway."

"And then?"

"And then I will prepare Electa Chalmers to be very sweet to you."

Mr. Archibald Dean said something under his breath.

"Don't swear, Archie," reproved Miss Vivian Everett.

CHAPTER VI

A GRAIN OF SALT

THE members of the Pegasus Club were finishing their fortnightly dinner at the Rev. Dr. Buford's. Several were already lighting their cigars, while others were sipping the last of their coffee. The talk was running quietly on, concerning the affairs of the day, public and private, when all were rather startled by an explosive statement from Mr. Robert Bleeker, who enforced his remark by slapping his hand on the table with a force to make the dishes rattle.

"I call it rank socialism," he declared. "Here are capital and enterprise invested in this railroad, and its stock and bonds have always been regarded as gilt-edged securities. If the franchise is not renewed it will mean financial ruin to many innocent people. The council was willing to grant the extension and everything was running smoothly, when this impudent demagogue, Price, gets hold of the 'News,' a paper which no one at this table ever sees or reads, and begins such a crusade against the renewal of the franchise that the credit of the com-

pany is already seriously impaired, and it begins to look as though there might be some doubt about the ultimate result."

"I can hardly believe the situation so serious," interposed Archie Dean, "but you are mistaken in saying none of us reads the 'News.'"

"It's a yellow sheet, even if it is your uncle's paper," retorted Bleeker.

"Oh, come," protested Dean, "whatever we may think of its opinions, the fact remains that this fight has doubled its circulation for the time being. Price is doing well, making lots of money, and we will get the franchise just the same. I saw the editorial to-night that seems to have offended you, and you must admit that it was full of ginger." Dean rather enjoyed "stirring up the animals" and starting off a lively debate.

"Full of dynamite," snorted the disgusted Bleeker.

"Read it, if you have it with you, Archie," suggested another diner.

"I think I have a copy in my overcoat," said Dean, and went to look for it.

"How does it happen that the franchise is about to expire?" queried one of the party.

"It was originally granted for forty years," explained Bleeker. "It could have been granted for a hundred or a thousand, just as well as not, and I wish it had been

with all my heart. The franchise expires at Christmas and we want it renewed for a hundred years or given in perpetuity. Young Price demands that the city hold the franchise itself, and operate the trolley lines, or, in the alternative, lease them to us at a ruinous rental which would practically drive us out of business and compel the city to step in and run the road in the end. You see, gentlemen, how rapidly socialism is making inroads upon us."

"There is a widow in my congregation who has every cent invested in Carthage Electric stock. I hope nothing will go wrong with the company," said Buford, anxiously.

At this point Archie Dean returned from his excursion into the cloak room with a copy of the "News" in his hand.

"Let's hear the editorial, Archie," urged several of the diners in chorus. Archie read:

A MONSTROUS STEAL

If the Common Council of the City of Carthage proposed to make a present of between \$15,000,000 and \$20,000,000 to any person or corporation, the people of Carthage would hang every man Jack who voted for it; they would ride every prospective donee out of town on a rail; they would appeal to the courts and take every step necessary to stop the rascality and robbery.

It is proposed to give away rights and property to the

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Carthage Electric Company worth just about such a sum, and it is said that the council favors the job and that it is likely to go through if something is n't done.

Do the aldermen fancy that this wholesale robbery can be committed with impunity? There are a few men left in Carthage who can't be bought, and it will prove the political death of every politician who ventures to support the job. If the company won't pay a fair price for a limited lease of the trolley lines the city should solve the problem by operating them herself. In either case, and in any event, this bold steal must be prevented.

The Trades Assembly will hold a mass meeting this evening to protest against the steal; and meetings will soon be called in every workingman's ward and district. The "News" is in this fight to stay, and the people are behind it.

"Somewhat fervid in his rhetoric," remarked one of the party. "I think Mr. Bleeker is right when he says that it smacks of dynamite."

"And yet," said Dr. Buford, "he seems a very earnest young man. Some of the European cities own their own tramways."

"But Europe is not America," declared Nathan Everett, who had hitherto listened in silence. "Things have been reduced to a system over there. Young men of education and position are put into places of trust, while here we have to take care of the ward heeler."

"Fudge," said Colonel Bliss. "I do not wish to be rude, Everett, but if everything is done so much better on the other side of the water, why does n't the tide of immigration set the other way?"

"Because everything is better on this side of the water, — except municipal politics."

"You will soon mend that, Everett," rejoined Colonel Bliss, whereat there was a general smile, for Everett was understood to be on the very verge of forming an alliance with Thomas Evans and all that was questionable in Carthage politics.

"How does it happen that Congressman Parkerson permits this sort of thing in the 'News'?" was asked.

Archie Dean explained that his uncle, the Congressman, was tired of the paper, especially as he was about to retire from public life, and had sold it out to Price on an option contract.

"That accounts for it," commented Professor DuBois.

"Accounts for what?" asked Bleeker.

"For the fellow's manly independence. His style is crude, his energy untempered by conservatism. I do not agree with his opinions; there is dynamite in them, if you will; but he is his own master, and that is more than can be said for any other editor in Carthage. Many are able and scholarly, but name one who does not write with one eye fixed on the counting-room. Is there one of

them who would dare incur the enmity of a great moneyed interest, as young Price is doing?" It was "give and take" at the Pegasus Club, where the same "great moneyed interest" was largely represented. Most of the capitalists present took the jibe good-humoredly. Not so Bleeker, however, who, as president of the Carthage Electric, had to bear the brunt of the controversy.

"It's mighty lucky they can't," he rejoined indignantly. "The papers are reckless and unscrupulous enough as it is. What would happen if they were all in the hands of socialists like Price?"

"I did not say that it would be a good thing," said DuBois, in a mollifying tone. "I merely intimated that there was a manly ring in that editorial that pleased me."

Bleeker was about to make an angry retort, but Everett plucked him by the sleeve. "Go it easy," he whispered, "do not let every one see how hard we are hit." Whereupon Bleeker choked down his wrath and hurried from the room.

This was the general signal for departure. Amid the general shuffle of chairs that followed, Everett lingered, whispering to Dean, "Cable at once to your uncle, Parkerson, and ask what he will take for the 'News' stock, provided we can manage to get rid of the option."

"Better see what you can do with Price before you go to that expense," urged Dean. "He is doing well with the

paper, and aside from this confounded franchise fight is a very decent sort of chap. Ask him up to dinner and be clever with him. It is cheaper to give a man a dinner than to buy a newspaper."

"I'll think of it. The suggestion has the merit of economy, at all events. Will you come too and help things along? We shall need all the help we can get in this matter."

"Oh, yes, I'll come, I always come, you know," said Archie, somewhat disconsolately. He had done a generous act in helping his rival to an *entrée* at the Everetts', but he did n't have that warm glow of an approving conscience which should have cheered him; on the contrary, he felt blue.

Everett noticed the tone, though he lacked the clew to its significance. But he had long set his heart on having Archie Dean for his son-in-law. "Anything gone wrong?" he asked anxiously.

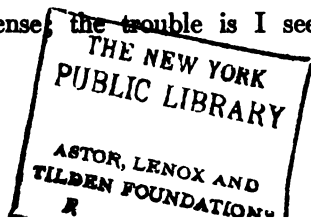
"Nothing more than usual. It is of no use, Mr. Everett, as I have often told you."

"You give up too easily," persisted Everett.

"You mistake me, I know the sex. It's all part and parcel of the desire to be incomprehensible."

"I never thought you would degenerate into a woman-hater, Archie."

"Nonsense; the trouble is I see through them, and



they do not like it. Why, I can give you three cardinal principles upon which any woman can be understood as easily as *A, B, C.*”

“Let’s have them,” said Everett, falling into the younger man’s whimsical humor, without attempting to press him more closely upon a delicate subject, though rightly surmising that matters were not progressing as satisfactorily as he could wish.

“First,” said Dean, putting his foot on a chair, and leaning his elbow upon his knee, “a woman should be taken seriously; second, a woman should be taken sympathetically; third,” shaking a salt cellar, “a woman should be taken with a little grain of salt.”

Everett laughed and the pair went to find Dr. Buford; but Dean’s suggestion about Price gave the banker food for reflection. Matters had reached a point where the Carthage Electric Company must do one of two things; make terms with Thomas Evans, or win over, or silence, John Price. The politician’s conditions were hard, unconscionably humiliating and rapacious. It seemed easier to deal with the young editor, who was intrenched less securely and should be less exacting.

So reasoned Everett, who did not have the insight of Evans into men and things; but he was quite as unscrupulous, though moving in a higher walk of life. The Trust Company of which he was president, had offices across

the street from the Evans retail hat store. Everett lived in a mansion on Chester Avenue and Evans on an unfashionable street; Everett had been more or less of a "reformer" in politics, and Evans himself was the whole machine; moreover, Mrs. Everett did n't know there was such a person as Mrs. Evans, yet both rejoiced in loving and devoted husbands.

All this afforded excellent reason why Nathan Everett should prefer any course rather than to beseech Thomas Evans for favors or meet his rapacious demands. The young editor's social prospects were, therefore, in the ascendant.

CHAPTER VII

MISCHIEF BREWING

ARCHIE DEAN was not as glad as he should have been, as in fact, he was expected and required to be, by Miss Vivian Everett, when that young lady apprised him that Electa Chalmers was to arrive on the morrow. This business of being handed over as a sort of birthday present from one young lady to another was amusing enough] at a summer resort, but it was fast assuming an aspect altogether too serious. He had an out-and-out quarrel with Vivian about it just prior to the Pegasus Club dinner and was in a decidedly refractory mood.

Electa Chalmers was in many ways still little more than a child, but she evinced a headstrong will and ardent temperament that rather alarmed the easy-going, indolent young attorney. Little Electa was only too evidently taken with him upon first acquaintance, and showed her preference without much attempt at concealment. Before Dean fairly appreciated that his attentions to her were more marked than to others, he was already in the

toils, and was rather relieved than otherwise when the two weeks at Narragansett came to an end.

But his affair with Electa was not to be terminated thus easily,— so both Vivian and Electa had decreed. Dean had at first regarded the young lady's too evident partiality with indolent satisfaction. If Vivian Everett was determined not to treat him as she should, here was another girl, younger and equally lovely, who saw him with other eyes. He was so accustomed to the notion that he belonged to Vivian by some peculiar sort of divine right, that he was almost shocked at the ease with which he was growing to tolerate the notion that he might one day love Electa Chalmers.

What had he done to unfold this little passion-flower, he wondered, as he found sweet-scented notes awaiting him at his rooms, telegrams arriving at his clubs, and long-distance telephone calls summoning him from his meals to hear a tender, pleading voice, over the oscillating wires, asking him why he did not write more often? What was he that all this shower of love should be bestowed upon him without stint, while the girl he and every one else thought ought to marry him remained his very good friend, and evidently never would or could be anything more?

Electa at Providence might be held aloof, but Electa as a guest of the Everetts at Carthage would be difficult,

if not impossible, to avoid; and Archie Dean seriously contemplated a voyage to Europe as the only available means of escape. His constitutional inertia alone prevented his taking some drastic measure to evade a situation which he foresaw must prove very embarrassing unless he concluded to yield gracefully to the fate which the two conspirators had designed for him.

Early in the afternoon Vivian telephoned him that Electa had arrived, and demanded that he present himself at the Everetts' forthwith; but he made an excuse and went to the Pegasus Club dinner instead. As he left Dr. Buford's he found that it was only half past nine and went for a stroll, fell into a brown study, and, as surely as chickens come home to roost, suddenly awoke to find himself ascending the steps of the Everett residence, though how he got there he had n't the faintest idea, — such was the force of habit, he could n't keep away from Vivian if he would.

Electa greeted him shyly and Vivian with some hauteur. What did he mean by going off to an old dinner and leaving them alone all the evening, when they had counted on his taking them to the Country Club, or somewhere, for a lark? And now it was too late to do anything. Dean did his best to mollify his hostess by devoting himself to Electa, and Miss Everett soon had another caller whom she discreetly took into the library, leaving

Dean and Electa by the piano, in the music room, where Miss Chalmers had been interspersing "rag-time" with their talk.

"‘I could die waltzing.’ A man said that to me last week while we were dancing this," rattled Electa as she played the "Dream Faces." "Was n't that silly? Why do men make such remarks? Do they suppose we have n't any sense of humor?"

"Perhaps he was tired," suggested Mr. Dean. "I have felt that way myself, — would have given worlds to sit down and catch my breath. You young things should have some consideration for decrepit old bachelors!"

"Nonsense; he was centre rush of the Brown football team. He was n't tired. He was just trying to be sweet, don't you see?"

"You really make me jealous," drawled Dean. "Did he have a big head of hair and wear a nose guard?"

"What a ridiculous idea; of course not, — the nose guard I mean, — not at a party. You always try to be so supercilious. It is n't a bit becoming. Vivian says she has tried to break you of it."

"And are you to resume my education where she left off?" queried Dean.

"Oh dear, no;" you have graduated, have n't you?"

"Perhaps, — she says so, anyway."

"And she has begun the same sort of schooling with

my poor cousin, John Price. It really is n't fair in his case. You are different and understand things. Have you seen him lately?"

"I see him about once a month and hear of him a great deal. You should be proud of your cousin, Miss Chalmers; he's really a coming man here."

"I'm so glad to hear it. I was afraid he would be so unhappy over Vivian he would never be fit for anything, but men don't take things to heart that way, do they?" asked Electa, wistfully. There was the strong implication in her tone that girls did.

"I'm afraid they do," said Dean gravely, "especially that sort of a man, — sincere, earnest, and yet, in a measure, unsophisticated."

"How do people get sophisticated? Could I learn it, somehow?" asked Miss Chalmers, with that affectation of extreme youthfulness she employed on occasion.

"It is n't taught at the finishing-school, then?" queried the cynical Mr. Dean.

Electa shook her head as she began to play a DeKoven overture, then broke off short to say, "But it's nice to be thought a woman of the world, who knows all about things."

"God forbid. I've seen enough of them," cried Dean.

More of the overture and another abrupt stop. "It's kind of you to say so anyway. I wonder —"

"Well?"

"Whether I ought to tell you what I wonder?"

"Unquestionably."

"I wonder whether Vivian really cares for any one, or ever will?"

"She is a lovely girl and means to do right; in fact is almost over-conscientious," replied the loyal chattel.

"But she is n't doing right now — about Cousin John, is she?"

"Why, what should she do, — now, at least? She can't go to him and tell him not to care for her any more, that on second thoughts she does n't love him, can she?" replied Dean, asking Electa the same question Vivian had asked him.

"Girls don't do that generally. Men are supposed to have some gumption," objected Electa, privately resolving to administer a special dose of it to her cousin at the first opportunity.

"But some one is usually kind enough to do it for them," insinuated Dean, hoping to cast an irksome undertaking upon Electa's dainty shoulders.

"Oh, I would n't interfere in such a case for the world," declared she, secretly wishing she could do it that very instant.


"Not if Vivian wished it?" asked Dean.

"Does she?"

"So much so that she even asked me to do it, but of course that is out of the question. Some one should do it for her, though; it is too bad to sit by and see the thing going on. What was all right at Narragansett would be absurd and almost reprehensible at Carthage. Price is too noble a fellow to be made light of, and Vivian realizes it, now that the mischief is done." In his eagerness to shirk a disagreeable task Dean put the situation as strongly as he knew how, and succeeded in working little Electa into a high pitch of indignation.

"It's a shame, a wicked shame," pronounced the girl, for the moment forgetting that she was speaking of her friend and hostess. Of course she thought it very sweet of Vivian to turn over all her right, title, and interest in and to Mr. Archibald Dean, as her slave, captive, and spoil of the chase — but Vivian had no business to acquire any such right of conquest over either Dean or John Price, thought Electa. What Archie could not well explain to Price, even at the instance and request of Vivian, his own cousin had both the right and the duty to say; but of course no one, not even Dean, must know she had given him any hint whatever.

"I wish I could interfere, but it would n't be right," she sighed. "I told mamma I would try and take Cousin John under my wing, so you must promise to save him



further unhappiness on account of Vivian, however disagreeable the task."

"Me? You know that is impossible," cried Dean, "even more so for me than for you. Take him under your wing, indeed. As well ask a sparrow to shield an ostrich."

"You might have compared me to a canary or a humming-bird; I hate sparrows," protested Electa.

So Dean made these and other flattering comparisons, and before half an hour had elapsed, found himself whispering loving words into a shell-like ear, while bright eyes shone and sweet lips smiled, and a little hand came somehow to nestle confidently in his. Electa had made up her mind that he should marry her, and Dean was n't made of the stern stuff to resist effectually.

As for the problem presented by the affair of Price and Vivian, after agreeing finally and emphatically that no one should interfere between them; that such things had to take their course, and that it was, after all, best that every one should mind his own business, each privately determined to undertake the mission, for the sake of the other and for the sake of John and Vivian.

Their conclusions thus expressed and mentally reserved, they proceeded to forget both Price and Miss Everett in their own mutual interests, which occupied them until the hour of midnight — that arrived all too soon.

Meanwhile Vivian was sitting alone on the veranda, and found the dark autumn evening both drear and chilly. In fact, she was n't enjoying herself at all. Everything was progressing according to the program she had arranged, and she was proportionately unhappy. No woman is so wretched as she who is given her own way absolutely. Of course it was right that Archie Dean should marry, and it was highly appropriate that she should select his wife for him; but what a ball of putty he was to let himself be moulded in such fashion! Why had n't he been made of sterner and more energetic stuff? Whatever should she do without him, she asked herself, suddenly discovering what a gaping void there would be in her life when Archie Dean went out of it; and who could take his place?

"I might advertise," she mused; "'Wanted: a companionable young man, of good manners and pleasing address, to dance attendance upon a young woman of marriageable years, without serious intentions; must be well-read, conversable, good-tempered, unemotional, poetic, tractable, obliging, sympathetic, tactful, and considerate; must understand and appreciate all her moods, never intrude when he is n't wanted, and must give her his exclusive devotion until she is ready to pass him along to another.' If I put that advertisement in a Carthage paper I must insert 'No editors or politicians need apply,'"

she added, with a half whimsical smile, as her thoughts took a new direction.

The addendum was, of course, *à-propos* of John Price, whose *status* in her world remained to be established, and must speedily be determined. Did she really like him? Would he not, after all, bore her to death, after she had known him for a month? How was it all to end? Certainly he would not answer any of the prospective requirements of her advertisement. He was distinctly unqualified to become any woman's gentleman usher; that much, at least, was certain.

That two emissaries had that very evening resolved to bear a message from her to Price to the effect that she did n't care for him, and had hitherto only been amusing herself at his expense, did not enter into her calculations, and would have disturbed her exceedingly. That Archie Dean had perhaps taken her seriously when she asked him to warn Price against her, now never entered her inconsistent little head. That one who had always assumed to read her every thought and anticipate every wish could be so "stupid and ridiculous," would have astonished her extremely.

"What are you doing here, Vivian? Are you not taking cold?" asked her father, as he came up the steps, with brow unusually clouded.

"Oh, just taking an airing; Archie and Electa are in

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the music room. What 's the matter, father?" she asked, instantly perceiving that something had gone very wrong.

"I have been having a vexatious evening with a rapacious rascal named Thomas Evans, the boss of Carthage. I must teach that man a lesson, Vivian, and young John Price is just the one to help me do it. Tell your mother to ask him to dinner, and for my sake you must try and be gracious to him when he comes."

"I'll try, papa," she promised, obediently.

CHAPTER VIII

SPOT CASH

THE four o'clock edition of the "News" had just gone to press when Robert Bleeker, president of the Carthage Electric Company, was ushered into editor Price's dusky den. "I want to have a little private talk with you," he said.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Bleeker?"

"Oh, you *can* do a great deal for us. You must be aware that you are making things very disagreeable in this franchise business, and I have come to ask you to let up."

"And allow you to secure for nothing what is worth several million dollars to the city?"

"You over-estimate the value of the franchise. Why, the company is only earning fair dividends, and you treat us all like a lot of thieves."

"Now look here, Mr. Bleeker," said the editor, "your entire plant could be duplicated for less than \$5,000,000. You are paying enormous salaries as well as interest and dividends on \$25,000,000. Allowing for water in the stock, the franchise can't be worth less than \$15,000,000.

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And yet you pretend to think it very hard that I should oppose the extension of this stupendous privilege indefinitely and *gratis*."

"The Carthage Electric Company has made Carthage what it is."

"Nonsense; the city of Carthage has made the Carthage Electric Company what it is."

"You are the only one who is making any trouble," urged Bleeker.

"Am I?" queried the editor. "Do you suppose that you would care a straw for me if the mass of the people were not behind me? You complain that I treat reputable gentlemen like a lot of thieves, — well, what are you reputable gentlemen trying to do? You are trying to steal fifteen million dollars, more or less, belonging to the city of Carthage. That is the fact in plain, unvarnished English."

"Now look here," said Bleeker, his voice dropping to a whisper. "Let's talk business. What do you want? Talk dollars and cents and stop ranting socialism."

"I am afraid you have n't read my editorials very carefully," returned Price with an amused smile. "I have tried to make my position clear."

"I have at least read enough of them not to want any more of the same sort published," admitted the street railway president, ruefully.

"But not enough to understand what principle I am advocating? Well, I will put it in a nutshell. There are just three courses open: first, to give you the franchise for a nominal sum, or *gratis*, — that cannot be permitted; second, to lease the road to your company for a limited period at a rental based on the fair value of the franchise; third, if you won't take it at that rental, for the city to assume full control and run the road itself."

"And what do you call a fair rental?" demanded Bleeker, thinking he saw an opening.

"Three per cent on the valuation of fifteen millions with due provisions as to taxes, say five hundred thousand dollars a year for twenty-five years. That gives the city what belongs to it and still leaves ample scope for private capital and enterprise."

"Fudge," snorted Bleeker. "The proposition is ridiculous, and I don't care to discuss it. You know well enough what I mean and what I came here for. Name your figure," and Bleeker clutched the check-book in his pocket, expecting to buy his man cheaply enough.

"You mean that you want to buy me?" asked John Price, his cheek flushing hot.

"That's my idea," responded Bleeker, bluntly.

"And what do you regard as my market value?" queried Price, with a curiosity half real and half affected.

"Oh, we will not balk at any small sum. You have

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got us practically where you can name your own terms. Twenty, thirty, fifty thousand dollars, — enough anyway to pay all you owe on Parkerson's stock, and make you independent for life. All we ask of you, in return, is what any perfectly honest and honorable man might do. Without turning a hair you can let go your hold on some of the aldermen, assure the others that you will let them alone, and send the franchise through at next week's meeting of the common council."

Price fixed his eyes on the wall, — the bare, dirty wall of his office. He was a man of the day, not a hero of melodrama. His heart and soul were in his paper. To its service he had given not only his best years and powers, but all his years and powers from earliest boyhood. And this man Bleeker was offering to save him five years at least of weary waiting for his heart's desire, five years of toil and scratch-soil poverty, to make his life's pathway easy, lucrative, and beyond all question financially successful.

Then he thought of his mother, and of that night by the water, under the stars. It was over. "Thank you, Mr. Bleeker," he said, and his voice was low, "thank you for the compliment you pay me in valuing my services so highly. I might be able to accommodate you, if I were alone in the world. But the women, Mr. Bleeker, the women, — you know; I could n't face the women. They

run us, after all; we'd be a pretty poor lot without them. I'm sorry. I need the money as much as the next man; but the deuce of it is, — I'm not for sale."

"All right, Price," said Bleeker, rising, and feeling decidedly cheap. "We'll fight you; and we'll break you; and I, for one, shall be damned sorry."

"He is probably right," thought Price, as Bleeker left the office. "They are very likely to break me, and then there will be only one man less out of the two hundred thousand in Carthage. The only wonder is that I have made them so much trouble. I have got to raise seven hundred and fifty dollars more for Dean before the end of the week. Likely as not somebody who owes me money will stave me off, instead of paying me at the time promised, and then, — I'm up the flume! Fifty thousand dollars! Whew! What does that mean? It means that it is cheaper to buy me than to fight me. I must tell Sam to keep his eyes open for signs of heavy bribes."

As soon as Bleeker had gone, Price hurried to the counting room to hold conferences with the bookkeeper, the circulator, and the advertising solicitor, seeking to impress his policy and some of his energetic vigor on his subordinates, — for he was a thoroughly practical business man, keen, sharp, and shrewd at a bargain as the proverbial Yankee, with all his idealism.

He had scarcely finished these details when Thomas

Evans was announced, and he turned, at the end of a day's work, usually performed on provincial newspapers by from three to five men, — a task which could only be accomplished by the highest tension of nervous excitement, — and went to meet his most dangerous and artful tempter; for Evans had upon Price the insidious hold of gratitude, and meant to use it as only he knew how to serve his own purposes.

"Bleeker was just here," said the editor; "he offers fifty thousand dollars, — enough to put me on my feet for life, — if I give up the franchise fight."

"And you were foolish enough to accept?" queried Evans, much disturbed. This was just what he had feared and had come to avert.

"I told him I was n't for sale," returned Price.

"That was only what I expected," replied Evans, with a gracious smile. "Hold them off with fair words until you hear from me, then make them come to double that figure, — it's worth it."

Price stared at Evans in surprise. "You, — you mean," he stammered, "that you are going to sell out and turn the city over to plunder?"

"You have been a newspaper man long enough to cut your eye teeth," whispered Evans. "That sort of talk sounds well in print, but in practical politics and practical business it is essentially silly. Be a man of the world,

Price. We will make them pay the city a substantial sum for the franchise, enough to serve as a monument to our capacity and public spirit for a generation, and line our own pockets as well, out of the coffers of these highly respectable gentlemen, who are little better than an organized band of public looters," and Evans assumed a plausible air of virtue.

"Whom we are to hold up for a share of the swag?" retorted Price, sternly. "Don't come to me, Thomas Evans, with any such proposition. You may sell out, if you choose, at your own figure, — but you cannot include me in the bargain."

"As you please," said Evans, biting his lip, and letting that cold, steel-blue light come into his eyes for a moment. "I trust you will think better of it, when the time comes, otherwise we shall come to the parting of the ways."

"And I shall be very sorry," sighed Price. "You have been a good friend to me, and I want to stand by you where I can. Can't you see that, whether you, or I, or another plunders the public treasury, for that is what it all amounts to, we are building on sand? That sort of thing can't go on very long in any community without disaster to all concerned. Look at the Latin American republics; their business men are just as able and shrewd as ours, but their only notion of government seems to be speculation."

"That's all right, my boy," applauded Evans. "I am

working in the city's interests as well as you. It's these very respectable, high-minded, and holy men of business here we've got to bring to time. It's only a question of terms, after all."

"For Carthage," interposed Price, determined not to permit his position to be misunderstood.

"For Carthage,—and for ourselves too," returned Evans, still mistaking Price's grateful anxiety to retain his friendship for a sign of ultimate yielding of principle, and deferring further discussion until the time came when it should be necessary to lay down upon the editor with a heavy hand. Price had not and would not sell out to the Carthage Electric Company; that was what Evans had come to learn, and for the present he was satisfied; but he thought it well to administer a warning that might serve as food for reflection in the young man's leisure hours, if he ever had any.

"Good-bye, John," said the politician, shaking hands, — "and a word of advice in parting. Treat with these people and listen to their propositions, but don't close with them. Leave the bargaining to me; but when the time comes, take what I secure for you, and be thankful. Don't be a fool, and a thankless ingrate into the bargain. For, if you should turn out that sort of a person, I will crush you like a mud-wasp, in spite of your puny sting."

Price followed the retreating form of the politician with

troubled eyes. The coming estrangement from Evans, now foreshadowed with certainty, was to be a bitter trial, and he foresaw would convert a good friend into a dangerous enemy.

"These threats mean something," thought Price, as he trudged homeward, after his long, hard day. "They mean mischief."

But presently, as he walked along, he began to trill a happy, joyous whistle. The events of the last fortnight were arranging themselves in memory's perspective, and, standing out in bold relief from all, — from the whirl and excitement, the reams of copy and columns of figures, the vexations, the trials, the temptations, thrusting them all into a dull and colorless background, — was a bright young face, framed in a halo of golden hair.

CHAPTER IX

MUSIC HATH CHARMS

AS the editor mounted the steps of his humble domicile, the door opened, and a smiling face looked out to greet him.

"Supper has been waiting, — waiting for some time; come down as soon as you can, John," said his mother.

Price made a very hasty toilet. His voracious appetite was beginning to assert itself. His mother had filled his soup-plate before he sat down and waited in silence for him to finish it. Nor was it until the second course was well under way that Mrs. Price saw that the nervous lines about her son's forehead were smoothing out, the tension in his face loosening, and the starved and tired animal gradually transforming itself into a civilized creature.

"You look as though you had had an unusually hard day, John," she said. "I am afraid you are almost killing yourself, dear."

"A hard but a happy one, mother; and as for killing myself, thanks to you I have a good digestion, and I'm

in no danger as long as I can restore myself by a supper like this."

"Are you ready for coffee?"

"Yes, please."

"There is a note on the mantel. Do you want it now?"

Of course he wanted it, and Mrs. Price watched her son's face, as he read, with eager curiosity; for notes, addressed in feminine hand were not frequent in his mail. It was evident that the letter gave him the keenest satisfaction. "Read it, mother," he said.

CHESTER AVENUE,
Wednesday afternoon.

DEAR MR. PRICE, — You cannot tell how much obliged to you we were in the matter of the school question. We wish to thank you for it, personally. Will it be possible for you to dine with us Friday evening and meet Miss Chalmers, who I believe is a relative of yours?

Sincerely,

CLARA E. EVERETT.

"You have seen Mrs. Everett recently, then?" asked Mrs. Price, as she finished reading.

"Yes, and Miss Everett also. They were at the office with a female delegation to haul me over the coals for an article about their schemes for sewing, cooking, and whatnot in the public schools."

"Oh, John, what *did* you want to meddle with a thing like that for?"

"Now, mother, don't you pitch into me, too. I left it to Sam and he made a mess of it and brought these women buzzing about my ears. I tried to stand by Sam, when Miss Everett came in and made me eat crow, cooked in every style; and what is more, she made me say I liked it. This invitation results from Electa's visit and my own docility."

"That is all very well, and I am glad you were graceful enough to retract; but don't let this Everett girl play with you. She is not good enough for you, John."

"Mother, is there a girl in the world you do think good enough for me?" (mischievously).

"Of course not," replied Mrs. Price, struggling with a sharp pang of maternal jealousy; "but I never expect you to look with my eyes. All that I am afraid of is that you will, perhaps, be dazzled by these Everetts, their tinsel of wealth and their social glitter. Do not undervalue yourself, John. Remember that Nathan Everett started a poor boy, just as you did; and, while his family is good old stock, it is no better than yours. So don't go and humble yourself in the dust before his daughter."

"Why should I?" he asked, and then, changing the subject, "Play me something," he commanded, as he lit his cigar and stretched himself out on the sofa at full length.



She began to warble gay little things out of the memories of her girlhood. *Page 93*



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"I wish you would not smoke so much, dear."

"All right," said John, puffing contentedly, "I'll take the matter under advisement. Give us a tune, mother, — something restful, you know."

Mendelssohn's "Songs without Words," which have proved balm to many a tired soul, began to whisper peaceful, dreamy things, sending suggestions of faces with wings to them through the curling smoke. Then came *Schlummerlied* and *Träumerei*, *Barcarolle* and *Berceuse*, *Nocturne* and *Romanza*, all her sweet, old-fashioned repertoire of soft and soothing sound.

"They are like spiritual opiates," said John. "Sing me something, mother."

"Oh, I'm getting too old to sing."

"You will never become too old to sing to me. Besides, though you have not the range you once had, your voice is as sweet and true as it was when I can first remember it."

Her son was the only musical critic for whose praise she cared a pin, and Mrs. Price was as pleased at the compliment as though it had come from a master of the musical art; and she began to warble gay little things out of the memories of her girlhood, while the recollections of old laughs, old good times, and fine old rousing songs came thronging back to her, out of the days before poverty and sorrow had banished her from the bright social world she had loved and shone in.

When John's father died the creditors found that the widow's rights and the widow's own fortune inherited from her father were considerable, enough to pay their claims in full; but otherwise the debts of the estate, in those days of shrunken values, would exceed its assets by a large amount. Some of them had suggested to Mrs. Price that it was hardly fair for her to live in luxury, while they suffered loss. John had come fairly by his Puritan doctrines, for Mrs. Price agreed to the justice of the proposition, and faced the world, supporting herself and little son by teaching music. One by one her fair weather friends forgot her, and she finally drifted away from her New England home to take a position in a conservatory at Carthage.

When John was fourteen, in spite of her protests, he insisted upon leaving school and assuming some of the burden upon his own shoulders, finding a humble place in the "News" office, where he had since passed his life. Then it was she began to regret her somewhat quixotic generosity. "I had the right to sacrifice myself; I had none to sacrifice you, John," she would say. But he did not agree with her, in fact had been wholly contented with his lot until Vivian had come into his life. He often talked of her with his mother and she fully sympathized in all his ambitions and gloried in his achievements. But just now he was too tired and, perhaps, too preoccupied,

to wish to talk much, and she, intuitively perceiving his mood, kept on singing for an hour or more.

And so, in pleasant talk and loving companionship, the tender home evening wore away. Happiness does not come to us all in one grand sweep of joy, with dramatic *mise en scene*, it is gleaned, almost unconsciously, here and there, in little golden sheaves along the waysides of life.

They were sufficient unto themselves, these two. They needed not luxury nor power, the whip of pride, the pomp of fashion, the insolence of wealth, passed over their humble abiding place and touched it not. Culture, art, refinement, were passed from the mother to the son, "with soft rebukes in blessings ended." Youth, strength, hope, ambition, playful merriment, graceful little compliments, passed from the son to the mother, mutually restoring, healing, comforting, softening. It was because he was clad in the enchanted garments of homespun woof, knit by tender mother fingers, that he could afford to scorn the tawdry tinsel toys with which men sought to buy his service, could dare — could dare — to offer battle to the power of corruption and the force of greed as exemplified by the Carthage Electric dragon.

Those who marvelled at his restless energy and inexhaustible supply of nerve power, and failed to understand whence he derived his pith, vigor, and vitality, were at

fault because they knew only the man as he worked, and did not know him as he rested.

Those who were aware from what worldly beginnings he had risen, and what a busy life he had led, wondered at his command of language and wide general information. The men against whom he was now pitted were almost all of liberal education; for he was not merely making money, but engaging in almost daily controversy, upon one subject or another, in the editorial page of the "News"; and his rivals on the other papers were at a loss to understand whence he had acquired his knowledge of art, music, literature, and the good taste with which he could both write and converse on these subjects, when occasion required.

Few guessed that all these things were the inbred graces with which the gentle, cultivated mother cloaked the shaggy individualism of her son.

CHAPTER X

COME INTO MY PARLOR

AS he was walking up Chester Avenue John Price began to wonder what sort of a reception he was to receive from Vivian Everett, whom he had not seen since the days at Narragansett, save for the brief interview at the "News" office. He had assumed that she would understand why he had held aloof on his return to Carthage, until he was able to meet her on a more proper footing, and in this view his own good sense had been reinforced by his mother's advice, — and yet the whole situation had its embarrassing phases.

Electa Chalmers and Archie Dean were sitting within the glass-inclosed veranda when he arrived, and this fact tended to put him at once at ease; for the talk naturally turned upon the house party at Narragansett Pier, where they had all so enjoyed themselves.

"Why did n't you let me know you were coming to Carthage?" asked John of Electa.

"I was n't just sure of the date myself," his cousin explained. She could n't very well tell him that her mother had made her wait until she could be sure that such a

visit would not cause social embarrassment to himself. "Mrs. Everett drove me around to call on Auntie Price this afternoon," she added. "Your mother said you would be kept at the office until you came up here."

"It was a very pleasant surprise to learn that I was to meet you again," returned Price, wondering whether Dean would continue to evince the same interest in his small cousin as formerly.

Vivian now came out to welcome her guest, saying that her mother was detained for the moment. "Let's take a stroll through the garden before dinner," she suggested. It was one of those mild, Indian summer evenings, and a golden haze hung over everything. "Just think, Electa, this is the first time Mr. Price has been to see me since last summer. Is n't he dreadfully negligent?" But Electa was already "paired off" with Dean, and made no reply; perhaps none was expected, for the remark was distinctly aimed at Price, though addressed to his cousin. Vivian, like a skilful general, wanted to carry the war into Africa.

"Did you really mean that?" asked John, looking into her face with frank questioning that was difficult to brook. "Did you expect me?"

"Why not? — Why should n't you have come before, if you wished to?" She neglected to state how glad she was he had not.

"Do you want me to tell you?" (with matter of fact earnestness). He was beginning very badly; but then, so was she!

"Oh, dear, no, what's the use of explaining? I'm very, very glad you are here, *now*. I want you to come, after this, often," said Vivian rapidly. She saw she could n't deal with this man as she could with Dean. He somehow could n't take things as a matter of course and make them easy for her.

"Really?"

"Why, do you doubt it?"

"No, but I wished to be certain."

"I see I shall have to take you in hand again," said the girl, with a desperate effort at frivolity. "You will never learn what flippant creatures we are, until you have had more experience with our whims. Never ask me, for instance, if I mean what I say, for I never do, exactly, when I come to think it over in sober earnest. No girl does; when brought right up to the mark all the 'ifs' and 'buts' come thronging to her mental vision until they collect in an array of confusion."

"Thank you," said Price gayly, "I need just that sort of instruction. My life is so tremendously serious, I am in danger of losing hold on the fancy and poetry of things. A woman's speech, I take it, essentially deals in hyperbole."

"Now you are beginning to talk like Archie, yonder. Set him off on the 'sex' sometime; he will lecture to you on our manifold shortcomings by the hour."

They had found a seat under a maple, leaved in crimson and gold, by the tennis lawn, and one of those pauses suddenly fell between them, such as will occur even when conversation is conducted by men of greater social experience than the editor of the "Carthage News."

"It was kind of you to come and see my den," said John, rather tensely. Perhaps it would have been better for him to say nothing and leave the responsibility to her.

"It was very bold of me, I'm afraid ; but as the mountain would not come to Mahomet,— you know,— besides, I wanted to." (Which after all was reason sufficient.) "You are a famous man, now, Mr. Price; every one seems to be talking about you and wondering what you are going to do next."

"Am I regarded as so very erratic?"

"No, only original, and with unusually high standards of right and wrong. I am afraid you have n't much patience with the shortcomings of ordinary mortals."

"The man who hitches his wagon to a star is apt to stick in the mud, you mean," suggested the editor.

"I could n't express the idea so well; that's Emerson, is n't it?" she asked.

"The star part; the mud is mine."

"Are you a muck-raker; some one said so?" queried Vivian, with a desperate effort to be saucy.

"Why don't you ask me if I have a 'nose for news.' Some one may have said that, too," he retorted.

There was another pause. Why could n't she talk lightly to this man? Wherein did he differ from others? Why was she so agitated in his presence? What made her long to look him in the face and tell him that she was not what he thought her; that she was unworthy of his strong love and sincere purpose; and yet she began to long eagerly for some fresh personal demonstration of both,— was secretly proud of him and of his simple-hearted devotion, wishing that she might make him say the things she knew to be trembling on his tongue, if only she dared give him a chance to speak as he would. This man would make love to her in no conventional, stereotyped way, if she would but let him, she knew that. He would tell her things that would move her very soul, crown her with diadems and jewels of eloquent passion, engulf her in a torrent of divine shine; but she feared, shrank from it all, trembling at his passionate energy and dynamic force. The placid river of her girlhood was entering upon a broad and tempestuous estuary,— beyond which lay the surging ocean; and yet she managed, after a fashion, to keep their talk in commonplace channels during the short interval that elapsed before


Mrs. Everett appeared, with apologies for her tardiness, to welcome Price, and ask them in to dinner.

Nathan Everett met the young editor with extended hand of cordial greeting. He said that he was glad to learn that John Price was a Medfield man, inheriting the business capacity of his grandfather.

They were no sooner seated at the dinner table than Everett began to speak of the franchise controversy, to the intense disgust of Price, who had fondly hoped to escape from the turmoil of contention for one short evening at least. In spite of the patent efforts of his host, he avoided being entrapped into any such discussion, but talked of art, music, and literature with the air of a connoisseur and the diction of a natural rhetorician.

Instead of being beneath his company, as Vivian had almost unconsciously feared might be the case, when he was tested by the criterion of conventional discourse, it soon transpired that he was considerably above it in general information and scholarly attainment. Possibly there was a touch of the dogmatism of the self-made man; but forceful opinions, strongly expressed, are apt to entertain, even if they do not convince.

After dinner, Everett, much chagrined at the deft way in which Price had avoided the subject he had most wished to talk about, whispered to his daughter: "As he will not talk to me, you must sound him. It is a



vital matter for me to know whether he is tied to Evans in any way, and whether he would be likely to entertain a proposition from us." Bleeker had not consulted Everett when he had endeavored to buy up the young editor.

"It is n't fair to ask me to do that, father," exclaimed Vivian, warmly.

"Why not?"

"We have asked him here as a guest. If he suspects us all of ulterior motives, he will never come again," she urged.

"Well, why should he? Why should we care?"

"Please talk to him yourself in his office. We should take no unfair advantage."

Everett knew well enough that his daughter was right about the matter. He would never have gone so far as to ask such a sacrifice of her had he not regarded it as essential, and he now said so. "My dear girl," he concluded, "I must take every advantage. I have never asked anything like this of you before and should not do so now were it not absolutely necessary."

"I'll try then," she promised, in a strained voice, for the sake of ending the argument; "but there must be no more of it. I like Mr. Price. He is a friend, father."

Everett glanced keenly at his daughter, puzzled more by the tone of her voice than by her very natural scruples which he had sought to overcome, and returned to his study ill at ease.

Mrs. Everett was meantime endeavoring to entertain the editor, and was rather relieved to have her daughter come to her social rescue. As soon as her mother was out of hearing, Vivian came directly to the point, scorning feminine *finesse*.

"Father wants me to ask you something, Mr. Price."

"Indeed?" (in some astonishment).

"Are you in any way attached to, or bound to Mr. Thomas Evans, the political 'boss' of Carthage?"

"My enemies say that I am his henchman," said Price, laughingly, more and more astonished.

"And what can your friends reply? He is a bad man, is n't he?"

"Possibly he is not what could be called a good man; but he has been a friend in need. It is through him that I secured control of the 'News.' It is because of him that I am sitting here to-night. The time may come when Thomas Evans and I can be friends no longer; but it will be a sorry day for me and those who wish me well."

"May I tell all this to father?"

"I would rather you would not speak of the 'News'; that is of no possible concern to any one but me, and perhaps one other."

"One other?"

"Shall I tell you whose?"

"Y-e-s" (with hesitation).

"Yours."

"Mine?"

"I said, 'perhaps.' Shall I say any more?"

"No, no, — not now, — at least, — perhaps not at all; I don't know why I should be so afraid of you, Mr. Price. I don't understand myself at all, — or you."

"Perhaps not; you will in time, and I can wait until that time comes. I fear that difficulties are going to arise between us. Your father will expect of me what I cannot do for any man."

"That is nothing to do with me, Mr. Price. I have told him so, and I can at least give you that assurance. Here's my hand on it."

He took her warm, soft hand, looked a moment thoughtfully at the dainty pearl and diamond cluster ring, then raised it to his lips. Somehow she could n't draw it away, although she had resolved that there never again should be anything like that between them.

"Why does every one speak of you as a stormy petrel?" the girl asked. "You are so gentle with me I can hardly believe you so firmly contentious. Is n't it better to be at peace with every one, and not try to reform the world in a few months?"

"Would you have me like that?" queried the editor, still holding her hand in his firm clasp.

"I hardly know. Other men go into business, and seem to get along very well without setting every one by the ears."

"What business, for instance?"

"Oh, tobacco, or hardware,— wholesale, of course,— or contracts, mines, banks, and things like that, you know," she explained, vaguely.

"I know something about tobacco. Shall I get out a new brand, and advertise it in the street cars: 'Price's Pet Smoke, only ten cents a package' with my picture on the label?" he asked quizzically.

"If I thought it would help you along I would even lend you one of my own photographs,— of course for commercial use exclusively," she exclaimed.

"No; you are too fair," he objected, his serious brown eyes sparkling with mischief. "The smoking public demands ladies exclusively of the Spanish type, except, possibly, on German cigar boxes, and there's no money in them."

"What shocking taste! There, sir, let go my hand. Electa and Archie are coming. You must talk with your cousin, now, or she will feel neglected."

As Vivian joined Dean, Electa also came directly to the topic uppermost in her mind, and which had been waiting this opportunity since she had discussed the affair between Price and Vivian with Archie.

"Cousin John," she said, "I am younger than you are, and, perhaps, you think me still a child; but I have grown up in the years that have elapsed since we played together, and I want to tell you something, if you will only let me."

"What is it, small chicken?" asked John, looking down from his great height at the elfish little creature and wondering what she could be driving at.

"Mamma says you have n't seen much of girls and don't realize what flippant, silly things they are."

"Your mother is probably right," he admitted.

"She told me I must help you and look after you."

"That's mighty kind of you both, chicken. What's on your mind? Have I been worrying you with my reckless plunge into society, eh?"

"I knew it would be like that. I don't mind your calling me 'chicken' when other people are n't around; but please do not tell Mr. Dean my nickname. He might n't respect me, you know. Seriously, John, you ought to have a sister, or some one to explain things, or you may get cruelly hurt, some day."

"Well, I have no sister, so my cousin will have to take her place. Thank you, Electa dear, I won't poke fun at you any more. What is it all about?"

"About Vivian, of course."

"You interest me."

"I don't want to talk against her. She is no better and no worse than any other girl, but I am afraid she is a dreadful flirt."

"So it would appear," observed Price, nodding toward where Miss Everett was having a heart-to-heart talk with her former chattel. "Men are insincere, too, sometimes, little cousin. It's a sharper's game, this love-making business, and a dangerous one to play with comparative strangers."

"Don't try to turn the tables on me, Cousin John; you are much cleverer than I and can do it easily. But listen to me. Vivian Everett is n't a girl who wears her heart on her sleeve, though she may seem to. She was especially nice to you at Narragansett because I asked her to be. I told her you had n't seen much of girls and had had a hard time, and I wanted her to,—to,—well, you know."

Electa was finding things more difficult to explain than she had anticipated, but now that she was in for it, bravely sought to make herself explicit.

"Did she ask you to say all this to me?" asked Price, without exhibiting a sign of the cruel pangs he was suffering. Every word his small cousin spoke felt like a stab.

"Not exactly; but she said something of the sort to Mr. Dean, and he did not feel quite at liberty,—"

"Naturally not."

"So I thought it my duty, though it was n't an easy one. — I hope I have done right?"

"Surely."

"And you will forgive me?"

"For what?"

"For meddling ; for hurting you, for saying things most people think it better left unsaid."

"You are a brave girl, 'chicken-little,' and a good one. No man should be offended by what comes from the heart, and I'll be frank in turn. I know all that you could say, and more; but it does n't, really, make any difference. I love Vivian Everett with all my heart and soul, and I confidently expect that she will one day return my love, though she does n't yet, — not consciously, at any rate. You can tell her what I have said, if you like, — I rather wish you would. I'll tell you something more, as a profound secret. She will probably marry me some day, — it's fate, destiny, Electa, decreed from the beginning of things."

"I did n't know it was in you to talk like that, Cousin John!"

"Nor I, either. It sounds like rant, does n't it? Meanwhile, I'll keep an eye on you, child, and make the retort courteous. This man Dean is a fine fellow, and I hope he loves you, but you and I are made of different stuff, Electa. Don't let him trifle with you."

"He could n't," said Electa Chalmers, with a strange light in her eyes. After all she was n't made of such different material from her big cousin as he might suppose. Her small body framed an iron will, and a purpose quite as intense, in a feminine way, as the more aggressive, domineering spirit of the editor of the "Carthage News."

Meanwhile Archie Dean was asking Vivian Everett to explain to him how a man could be honestly in love with two women at one and the same time.

Vivian shook her head somewhat impatiently: "I'm all out of sorts with you, Archie," she said. "You have never been really, truly, and earnestly in love with any one yet, that is what it all amounts to."

"Try me and see," he replied, with sudden vehemence. "I don't like the way things are going, Vivian. Pretty soon it will be too late. You are entangling me with that sweet little woman up there, out of sheer caprice. There is but one escape for either of us. Let us announce our engagement to-morrow. It is now or never."

"It is 'never,' Archie," answered Miss Vivian Everett, firmly.

CHAPTER XI

THE GOLDEN CALF

NATHAN EVERETT was not at all satisfied with the non-committal report his daughter chose to make concerning the attitude of John Price towards Thomas Evans and the Carthage Electric Company. He did not care to confess to her how deeply he was involved in the franchise controversy. He was by nature and vocation a speculator, and had purchased Carthage Electric stock heavily as its securities declined and became a drag on the local market owing to the approaching termination of its franchise, and the growing danger that it might not be renewed. Confident of his skill in manipulation, and that he could secure a renewal of the franchise on terms most favorable to the company, he had made a bold plunge and risked everything he had in expectation of doubling his fortune on a quick turn. That Vivian should select such a juncture to be squeamish about using the influence she had evidently acquired over the editor to his and her own advantage filled him with concern.

The fact is, Price's admiration for Miss Everett was

of such quality that no one could see them together without observing his infatuation, for it shone out all over him. It was when he saw this that Everett had determined to enlist his daughter's services, and he was much chagrined at the paucity of the result. "He would do anything you asked him to, Vivian. Why be so finical about it?" urged her father, impatiently.

"Do you want me to marry him, papa?" she asked rather sharply.

"How absurd," exclaimed the banker, who, while seeing Price's fascination clearly enough, did not dream there could be the least reciprocal feeling on her part.

"But what else can it mean; if I undertake to influence him and presume to control the policy of his paper?" she demanded.

"You have acquired as much or more influence with other men; and yet have never compromised yourself. I can't see what has got into you, Vivian!"

"But they were men of another sort, bankers, brokers, speculators, men about town, men of the world, our world," protested the girl. "Mr. Price is very different from all these. No woman would dare play with him, papa, or ask of him anything he would think dishonorable. She would only succeed in losing his respect without in the least altering his purpose."

Everett laughed fretfully. "You overestimate the

chap, Vivy," he said; "he is little more than a self-seeking young demagogue, in my humble judgment." Everett had not troubled himself to study John Price, and estimated him as he judged others. He had merely been proceeding on Archie Dean's suggestion that it was cheaper to give a man a dinner than to buy a newspaper or a politician.

Vivian did not care to discuss the matter further. "If you are right," she said, "you don't need me. If you are wrong, I could n't help you anyway, and what is more, papa, I would n't; so try him yourself." She said this with such an air of finality that her father dropped the subject. Quite aside from any other consideration Miss Everett was determined to hold the editor aloof and avoid every situation that could possibly produce an entanglement. "If Archie Dean thinks any man can marry me against my will he does n't know what stuff I'm made of," was her thought.

Price and Dean left the Everetts' together that evening and Archie did his best, in a tactful way, to insinuate the promised warning against the coqueties of Vivian. He was in a rather bitter mood towards that young lady, and his own disappointment led him to do her bidding in respect to Price, though he had protested to her and to Electa that such interference on his part was out of the question.

As they walked along toward the centre of the city Dean fell to discussing the contrasting characters of the two young ladies, in the most natural way, and thus opened for himself the opportunity to say to Price that Vivian was an accomplished girl, with a good heart, but insinuated that she was rather spoiled by adulation, while a worldly mother and a scheming father had failed to develop in her a very keen sensibility. That was as far as Dean could well go, farther than he would have gone under any other circumstances, but Price made no reply to these observations and hastened to change the subject.

He might be frankly outspoken with his cousin Electa; but his instincts revolted against discussing such matters with another man, especially with Dean, whom he could not help regarding with tolerant derision, notwithstanding a long-continued friendship; for they had been friends for several years, in spite of the wide divergence of character and environment that distinguished them.

Price had possessed a strong fascination for Dean from their very first meeting, and their acquaintance had grown into an intimacy wholly of Dean's seeking. The man of strong convictions and the man of no convictions at all, the man of ideas and hobbies and the man of fancies and fads, the man of the people and the man of caste, the earnest enthusiast and the finical cynic, found in each other excellent foils.

But although he had waved Electa aside and quietly silenced Dean, John Price passed a wakeful night and rose heavy eyed upon the morrow, for he was not blind; he was a very shrewd observer, with all his force and enthusiasm. It was only too clear that he had been invited to the Everetts' not because of his previous acquaintance with Vivian, or on account of his cousin Electa, but for the reason that he had acquired power which Nathan Everett wished to use for his own purposes, — though he was too loyal and large-minded to believe that Vivian had an essential part in the ignoble manœuvre.

At breakfast his mother mentioned the call of Electa and Mrs. Everett the afternoon previous. "It is rather strange she has discovered us so suddenly," remarked Mrs. Price.

"Oh, they could n't very well continue to ignore us with Electa as their guest," replied her son, determined to allow no suspicion of the true situation to beset his mother, whom he knew it would make unhappy, for she had a sensitiveness of pride even more acute than that of her son, living as she did so much more secluded from the blunting influences of men and things.


"Is n't it rather curious they should ask Electa here just as you are rising into prominence?" she persisted. Perhaps she knew more than did her son of the social difficulties that had delayed Electa's visit and threatened

to prevent her coming altogether. Mrs. Chalmers and Mrs. Price were sisters who formed a very close corporation and discreetly kept their own counsel, but an anxious and loving mother may sometimes accomplish wonders of diplomacy with secrecy profound.

"On the contrary, very natural," pronounced John. His mother thought she had said enough to put him on his guard, being unaware how many others had sought to do the same thing. Had his love been less strong and his devotion less sincere there had been sufficient meddling to end his affair with Vivian then and there.

Under these circumstances Vivian's father could not have selected a more unfavorable occasion to seek the editor of the "Carthage News" for the purpose of enlisting his services. But Everett also had passed a restless night. Matters were fast approaching a crisis with the company in which he was so largely interested and he was forced to move quickly. He must win the support of John Price or make terms with "Boss" Evans at once. Bleeker saw him early in the day and apprised him of his own failure with the editor, but Everett, none the less, determined to try him once more.

He found Price immersed in reams of manuscript, and their conference was short. Price would listen to no offers from the Carthage Electric. He would neither sell his interest in the "News" stock, for which Everett offered one



hundred thousand dollars cash, nor would he sell himself or his services: "for that is what it all comes to in plain English," he said.

"Then would you join a reform movement, to unhorse Tom Evans?" demanded Everett, trying another horn of the dilemma.

"What chance is there of success?" queried the practical Yankee, with some curiosity.

"The Rev. Dr. Buford is at its head, and some of our best citizens are preparing to organize," urged Everett, playing what he believed to be his trump card. "They are forming a committee of one hundred, and are anxious to have you of our number and take a leading part in purifying Carthage politics and freeing us all from the boss rule which is becoming insufferable in its greed and corruption."

Everett spoke with bitter earnestness. Evans demanded a cool million as a *petit pour-boire* in return for his support, and Everett believed that the politician's ruin might be accomplished for one quarter that sum, perhaps less, with the help of highly reputable citizens like Dr. Buford, led by a vigorous enthusiast like John Price.

"I hope we can make politics cleaner some day," replied the editor, "and will look into the situation." He said this with some hesitation, for his debt of gratitude to Evans weighed heavily upon him.

"I'll have Neubauer send us our prospectus and constitution," said Everett, with a sense of triumph; he felt sure of Price, now, and the ultimate defeat of the boss; or at least that Evans would be forced to make more reasonable terms.

"Neubauer?" asked Price in amazement.

"Yes, our secretary."

"Rheumatic invalid, clerk in the customs house?"

"The same; why?"

"He is your secretary, knows all your most secret plans?"

"He is one of Dr. Buford's parishioners, was appointed on the clergyman's recommendation, and knows the political situation thoroughly, — besides, we have agreed to pay him a high salary, and in return, he is to deliver his ward."

John Price laughed, — he could n't help it, — laughed in the very face of Nathan Everett.

"What do you mean, sir?" demanded the banker, in high dudgeon.

Price checked himself in his unseemly mirth and made the best apology he could without betraying state secrets. Then he said: "Let me give you a word of friendly advice, Mr. Everett; stick to a business you understand and keep out of politics. You and your friends think to buy men and hold their fidelity for so much spot cash. It's a waste of good money, to say the least. You can never make a winning fight against Tom Evans with such men

and such methods. He plays with the hearts of men, not their purses. He has the art of exacting loyalty from his adherents, such as was given by a Highland clansman to his chief. He is intrenched by years of assiduity in the work of placing men of all classes and conditions under debts of gratitude and obligation, which outweigh all other considerations. No, sir, you must show me a better managed organization, formed for a better cause, and served by more faithful and disinterested adherents, before I will join hands with you for a struggle against Tom Evans."

Nathan Everett and John Price parted with no mutual regard, — neither, perhaps, had been at pains to show his best side to the other. "He is a henchman of the 'boss' and a blatant demagogue into the bargain," pronounced Vivian's father.

"An unprincipled schemer, if there ever was one," reflected the editor, as he turned once more to the task of getting out the first edition of the "Carthage News."

Within half an hour after he left the "News" office Nathan Everett abandoned the "reform" movement, and made terms with Thomas Evans, effecting a hard and fast alliance, offensive and defensive. Tom Evans was for sale, though his price was very high. It was his business to bleed wealthy corporations. How else could he take care of the poor of his district?

"The first thing to do," said Everett, as soon as their alliance was perfected, "is to pull off that rascally demagogue who has been hammering us in the 'News.' "

"Oh, I can take care of the franchise without that," replied Evans, confidently. "You are mistaken about John Price. He is an able and sincere young fellow, whose good opinion is worth having. I'm rather proud of him, Everett. I discovered him, picked him out of the mud and placed him where he is, — a thorn in your flesh," and the politician chuckled.

"Then pluck it out, at once," cried the banker with a wry face, not relishing the jest.

"Not so fast," said Evans. "I can't well expect him to blow hot and cold like that. He would never have been so effective had he been a mere time-server. No, Mr. Everett, I needed Price to stop your buying up the aldermen like so much calico; but I don't need him to put the franchise through. That can be done quietly and without any noise. Let Price remain in opposition. I own the council and will deliver the goods; never fear."

"As you please," assented the banker, though he had his misgivings. The fact was he had waited so long before coming to terms that Evans failed for the moment to appreciate what a heavy contract he had undertaken. This was very quickly developed, however, when he came to call upon his subordinates, Fagan and Driscoll, upon whom he re-

lied to manipulate the council. They represented the difficulties in no uncertain language. Price had stirred up such a row that the eye of the public was on every member of the council. What many of the aldermen might be willing to do, provided they could not be caught, they now feared to undertake. The ranks of the organization had further been depleted by the death of the alderman from the Seventeenth Ward whose place would have to be filled by means of a special election. Until this was held and a machine candidate returned for the vacancy the necessary votes could not be mustered.

As the upshot of all this Everett was obliged to curb his impatience and Evans was forced to undertake to pull Price into line. "The situation is too delicate to ride over public sentiment rough shod," he explained at a conference with the capitalist that evening. "The best people of the city are with your company, many of them hold its securities, many more have friends who are financially interested. In a little while the opposition will spend its force and die out, while we will get the votes necessary as soon as the special election can be held, and then put it through, willy-nilly."


Everett had to be satisfied with this. In any event he felt fairly sure of the franchise sooner or later, for there was no doubt Evans could deliver the goods if he chose, and he had now every interest to do so. The Carthage Electric

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directors could afford to take things easy and watch his moves.

Parting from Evans and his henchmen at a late hour, Everett walked up Chester Avenue to where the gables of his palatial home glistened in the moonlight. What had he not sacrificed to build that home, and acquire the princely fortune that supported it? Sacrifices of honor, sacrifices of pride, of kindness, charity, religion. That his wife and daughter might enjoy fine things and fine company, might never want for the smallest trifle, might proudly bear his proud name while smoothing the wrinkles from his brow with soft caress of loving fingers, Everett bought men and sold them, Everett schemed and plotted, Everett, whose natural impulses were for kindness and light, walked in ways that were fruitful of bitterness and darkness.

Perhaps he thought of these things as he sighed so heavily, while opening the wide hall door with his latch-key.



CHAPTER XII

HER INFINITE VARIETY

IT'S an infernal outrage," exclaimed Archie Dean, as he read the following cablegram:

Sell "News" stock to Everett. Break Price contract. Deliver paper over: they to guarantee us against suit for damages.

PARKERSON.

"Why is it?" he asked himself, "when a man is going to do a dirty trick, he turns the details over to his lawyer, and washes his own hands of the whole affair with sanctimonious unction?"

Price was his friend and he was practically engaged to marry the editor's own cousin. This despatch called upon him to take an active part in the impending ruin of Price. It was n't a pleasant situation. Archie Dean's obliging good nature often involved him in this way, though seldom so flagrantly. Upon his shoulders his whole family and *clientèle* had fallen into the habit of thrusting all sorts of disagreeable tasks. It was to him Vivian had turned when

she found Price's attentions prospectively inconvenient. It was to him his uncle, Parkerson, was now intrusting the task of ousting Price from the editorship of the "News." It was upon him Nathan Everett would rely to execute the *coup* with neatness and despatch. "Well, it's all in a day's work, I suppose," sighed Dean, as he closed his desk and set out for Chester Avenue, where he was under contract to amuse Vivian and oblige her by making love to her attractive guest.

"You are to take Electa to the Country Club," announced Miss Everett. "I have some letters to write and will join you there with the Merrills, later. Electa is dressing and will be down presently."

"I see you have it all arranged," said Dean, with a wan smile. He was a bit weary of having his every act in life laid out for him by others.

"Don't you like the plan?" asked Vivian, looking upon her quondam chattel with the elevated eye-brows of well-acted astonishment.

"Oh, well enough, only it sounds dreadfully energetic," complained Archie, as he sank into a chair and fell into an attitude of dejection.

"What's the matter? Don't you feel well? Shall I fetch you smelling-salts, or — or a bracer of some sort?" queried Miss Everett, with half real, half affected anxiety.

"Oh, I'm all right; only my doll is stuffed with sawdust and the fact oppresses me this afternoon," bewailed Mr. Dean, misanthropically.

"What a dreadfully effeminate way of saying you have blue devils; cheer up. I'd go too, only I want you to become accustomed to Electa; it's the only salvation for either of us, Archie. We are so habituated to one another, we are lonely apart; but the separation must come sooner or later, and the sooner the better for both of us," and Vivian settled herself by his side, to look into his eyes with a sisterly fondness that had so often soothed and cheered him, until the need for her sympathy and companionship had become a part of his very being.

"Why must it be?" he sighed. "What's the use of it? You have planned out life-long wretchedness for both of us, Vivian, and are bent on enforcing your own decree, without rhyme or reason, simply and solely because you have so resolved."

"You are too metaphysical by half, Archie," laughed the girl. "I am not quite so blindly obstinate and foolish as you would believe me. We are both going to be very happy; you with Electa, and I with — with — by myself, of course, I mean," and Miss Everett bit her lip and blushed furiously, as she realized what he might imply.

"Look here, Vivian, you don't really mean it?" he exclaimed, with unusual energy.

"Mean what?" (still very red).

"That, by any possibility, you can actually care for that man?"

"Why do you ask? Do sit down and calm yourself. Suppose I should like him. What is that to you? We have both agreed to be friends and nothing more, and that you are to be happy with Electa."

"I can't make you out, Vivian," said Dean, pacing the floor in great perturbation, "there was a time, once, when I thought I understood you thoroughly, but it seems to have passed."

"Well, it could n't be expected to last forever," said Vivian, regaining her composure as he became more and more agitated.

"But just look at the situation. Here you have given me a message to a man that he must abandon overweening and presumptuous hope —"

"Which, of course, you could n't deliver," laughed Miss Everett.

"Laugh if you please," retorted Dean, much ruffled. "but here I have been trying for a week to immolate myself on the altar of diplomacy and save Price from falling victim to a hopeless attachment —"

"You've been doing what!" cried Vivian, in her turn springing to her feet and seizing Mr. Archibald Dean by the shoulder.

"Why, only trying as best I could to accomplish what you yourself asked me to do," he protested.

"What I asked you to do?" (in puzzled astonishment).

"Certainly."

"What on earth do you mean, sir?"

"Why, don't you remember, out there on the tennis lawn, when you were so unhappy about what went on at Narragansett, and the way Price was taking it, making a vain struggle against long odds, so noble and so pitifully hopeless? Why, actually, there were tears in your eyes about it, Vivian."

"What have you been saying to Mr. Price, Archie Dean?" demanded Miss Everett, in hard, tense tones.

"Oh, nothing, except that you were more or less of a coquette, with a worldly education and a social father and mother, and were n't accustomed to being taken too seriously."

"Indeed! That was so kind of you. Did you say anything else?"

"Nothing, as far as I am concerned. I'm sure I don't know what Electa may have said to him," pleaded poor Dean, who fairly quailed before those blue eyes that had just seemed so sweet and friendly.

Vivian put her hand to her heart, as though in pain, released Mr. Dean's shoulder, which she had clenched until it must have received marks of her finger prints,

and made a desperate effort to suppress her agitation and recover her self-control.

"You think Electa has also undertaken to say unpleasant things about me to Mr. Price?"

"Not unpleasant things, exactly; the whole idea was to warn him that he must n't suppose, must n't think, must n't imagine, — those were your rather vague injunctions, as I recollect them," explained Mr. Dean.

"And you and she have dared?"

"Why not? Would you have us let the thing go on without a friendly word, when you yourself had expressed the wish, — in fact, the command, that it be spoken?" he asked, in sore perplexity.

"Archie Dean, I do not like to say just what I think of you, but I never dreamed that you could be such an unmitigated nuisance, meddler, mischief-maker; and as for Electa, after all I've done for her, I wish I had n't invited her to come to this house, I wish she had never been born, or you, or I — either —" and Miss Everett, having made this summary disposition of the *dramatis personæ* began to sob hysterically.

If there was one thing in the world Mr. Dean was afraid of it was woman's tears, and he watched Vivian with the sense of having done something criminal. "Now Vivy, dear Vivy, don't, please don't," he pleaded, bending over her in a very lover-like attitude.

"Oh, please excuse *me*; I see I am not wanted," exclaimed Miss Electa Chalmers, entering at this critical moment, and then starting as if to leave the room again, with flushed cheeks and over brilliant eyes.

"Stop!" cried Vivian, overtaking Electa, just as she reached the door, "for goodness' sake let's all try to understand each other; we have all been acting at cross-purposes long enough. I was crying, Electa, because you and Mr. Dean have been so wretchedly stupid as to meddle between me and Mr. Price."

"Oh," cried Electa, smiling, and much relieved, "is that all?"

"Is n't that enough, I should like to know," exclaimed Miss Everett, with extreme vexation.

"There is no great harm in that," responded Electa, with astonishing nonchalance. "I was n't thinking about that at all. I supposed you and Mr. Dean —" and she glanced from one to the other with a lingering trace of jealous suspicion.

"Oh, you need n't worry," retorted Vivian, with a look of crushing scorn at poor Dean. "I never cried about him in all my life; but I did think you both had more sense, I had almost said decency, than to meddle in such fashion in other people's affairs. I can't put my feelings into words, Electa; the whole thing is too absurd, outrageous, abominable!"

"My darling Vivy, did I hurt you? I meant to do you a kindness and set things right. You see, Mr. Dean told me —"

"But you should have known better than to pay any attention to what he told you" (with another withering glance at the long-suffering Dean).

"But do you really mean that you didn't wish us to say anything to Cousin John?" bewailed Electa, in astonishment.

"Of course I did n't; it's the most ridiculous notion I ever heard of," declared the consistent Miss Everett, tears gathering in her eyes once more.

"Who would have dreamed it? Whatever shall we do?" asked Miss Chalmers.

"Could n't we all three go down to the 'News' office and explain things," suggested Dean, not wholly serious.

"Archie, I cannot bear any more this afternoon," protested Miss Everett. "Just go away like a kind friend, and play billiards, or bridge, or any other game you really understand, and leave us alone for the rest of the day."

"Yes, go away now; you are n't of any use at all," chimed in Miss Chalmers; "but come again this evening when we have made matters right, and we will both be real nice to you to make up for it all."

Archie Dean took his departure, with crestfallen air, and went to lose more than he should at five cents a heart. "Hearts are n't my game, I guess," he sighed, as he

paid his shot and went to dinner, after partaking of more cocktails than the law allows.

"Whatever shall we do?" asked Vivian, when the marplot had disappeared.

But Electa already had formed a plan for meeting the situation. "Suppose we go and call on Auntie Price," she suggested. "She is the sweetest, dearest of women, and always does and says the right thing at the right time. We won't have to speak things right out, as we should be obliged to in order to make it all clear to a man, but we can say just enough to let her grasp the situation. She will be sure to explain to Cousin John, and the very fact that you have called on his mother will go very far to set things right without any explanation at all."

"Electa, you are splendid; I did n't suppose you had so much diplomacy in you," applauded Miss Everett.

"Shall I drop a hint to John, myself?" asked Miss Chalmers.

"Not for worlds!" rejoined Vivian, with emphatic decision. "There has been quite enough of that sort of thing, and if you have any regard for me you will let him alone altogether. You see, Electa, I am not sure of myself at all. I am not positive I even like him. I don't understand myself in the least."

"You will soon," predicted Electa, sagely. "Meanwhile, it won't do any harm to keep him guessing."

So the young ladies called upon Mrs. Price, and all three talked about the weather, and kindred topics, with feminine effusion. To the masculine mind the conversation would have seemed ineffably inane and barren of results. Yet they all understood each other perfectly.

Mrs. Price, however, thought it best to let matters take their course without interference from her, for her son had exhibited no sign of wavering in his attachment, and she thought him rather too hard hit for his own good or the success of his suit.

Occasionally a blunt, outspoken person does great good in the world, — as well as some harm. There is such a thing as an overplus of diplomacy and *finesse*.

Electa Chalmers gave Archie Dean so delectable an evening that it went far to heal his wounded feelings and make him contented with his lot, in spite of the fact that Miss Everett did not see fit to put in an appearance at all. The fact is, Dean saw breakers ahead in every direction. The political and financial enemies young Price had made for himself were combining for his downfall, and the blow must soon descend. What made Dean feel all the more guilty, as he flirted with the editor's cousin, was the fact that he had been selected as the headsman, and must wield the ax in the execution planned for the morrow. Would he ever be able to justify himself either to Vivian or to Electa?


It was a false position, from which there seemed no escape, so he had made the most of the calm before the storm and committed himself further than he had intended, or, perhaps, desired. When he left the Everett residence Electa Chalmers had promised to be his wife.

CHAPTER XIII

CONSPIRACY

WHEN Thomas Evans negotiated the deal whereby Congressman Parkerson gave John Price an option on his stock in the "Carthage News," and placed the young man in control of that weak and struggling paper, he had not calculated upon raising a force in the city of Carthage which would achieve such rapid growth in a few weeks that it fairly overtowered him. He did not even realize this to be the fact when the arrogant directors of the Carthage Electric Company, who had scorned his authority and flouted his organization, came on bended knee to enlist his services at whatever figure he saw fit to name. He imagined that he could control the council and pass the franchise in the teeth of all opposition, while the complaisant mayor would not dare rebel, but would affix his signature as a matter of course.

It was therefore with rage and consternation that he saw his most trusted supporters, one by one, show the white feather and slink to the rear, until he actually lacked one vote of the number requisite to pass the franchise, and found it necessary to carry a caucus and a special election



against John Price, the very young man who should owe him such a debt of gratitude.

He had pocketed the rebuff he had received at the hands of Price, earlier in the controversy, with serene good nature, for he had thought himself powerful enough to get along without the help of the editor; but the energy and eloquence of Price had overset the cherished plans of the politician, and Evans entered the "News" office in a very uncomfortable frame of mind.

"Well, Price, is it to be peace or war between us?" he asked, dropping into a seat.

"I have no quarrel with you, sir, and would be glad to remain your friend, if I can," he replied.

"I have been obliged to yield a point to the Carthage Electric Company," explained Evans. "They are to pay the city half a million dollars in return for the franchise in perpetuity, that will cut the tax rate way down this year and prove a feather in the cap for both of us."

"And give away about fifteen millions of the people's money? How can you face me, or any other honest citizen of this town who knows the facts, with such a proposition, Mr. Evans," demanded Price.

"It's more than has been paid anywhere else under similar circumstances," asserted Evans, though he did n't give his authority for the statement. As a matter of fact it was as much as the company was going to pay Evans

himself. At the last moment he had agreed to cut his personal demand in two, and divide the spoils of war with the public at large; hence he was feeling peculiarly virtuous, just then.

"It's of no use to discuss the question," said Price, shaking his head. "We differ to such an extent that there can be no hope of compromise."

"I had thought, perhaps, —" began Evans, suavely.

"There can be no perhaps," interposed the editor; "we can't agree; so let's differ, and fight it out like men."

"Then you are going to run for alderman in the Seventeenth Ward?"

"I must," insisted Price. "I don't want the office, would n't take it as a gift under ordinary circumstances, but no one else will undertake the fight, and it is one that should be made."

"And I thought that you would prove loyal," muttered Evans, bitterly.

"I am under deep obligations to you, sir," said Price, sadly. "I wish that we might remain friends, that I might prove to you, one day, that you made no mistake in lending me a helping hand, when I was down; but you can't expect me to betray my principles, the city, the people who believe in me and trust me, upon considerations of personal gratitude and personal friendship; can't you see that what you ask is out of the question?"

"No, I cannot," cried Evans, his eyes taking on their look, hard and cruel. "I have made men, John Price, in my day, and I have broken them. I set you up a few weeks ago, and now I will knock you down. I think you will admit I make no idle threats."

"True enough," confessed Price, "and more 's the pity, Thomas Evans; for I will give you the fight of your life, and before I drop I'll shake your power to its very foundations. I will not ignore what is good in you, but I will so expose the evil that all men shall know you for what you are, — one of the ablest, shrewdest, most kind-hearted, and humane politicians that ever tainted the moral fibre of a community with insidious corruption."

"And I will show you up for what you are," roared Evans, losing his self-control, almost for the first time in his long and successful career, for the scorn of Price cut him to the quick, "as an ungrateful, impracticable crank, upon whom all kindness is thrown away, all good-fellowship and friendship utterly wasted, whose vocabulary does n't contain the word 'gratitude' or 'loyalty,' but who would sacrifice any one and every one to the hobby of the hour."

The two men looked at each other in silence, each regretting that they had reached the parting of the ways, each secretly admiring the other, while outwardly spurning him; each aware that he was soon to cross swords with a skilful and resourceful adversary.

"God save you from your enemies, John Price, and God save me from my friends," said Evans at last, as he turned his back upon the editor, and went forth to plot his ruin.

"If he had only been man enough to stand by me to the end of this fight, no one could have shaken his power, as long as he lived," muttered Price, "but I'm going to see it through to a finish single-handed; they may hurt me, may down me for a time, but it will prove the political and moral death of Thomas Evans," and he turned to pen an editorial exposing the newly formed alliance of the Carthage Electric Company with the Evans machine, whose fervid rhetoric stung Evans, when he read it that night, like a slap in the face.

When Vivian Everett entered the parlor about eleven o'clock that morning she saw a fresh-faced, dapper gentleman of suave smile and bland demeanor waiting for her father, who was expected soon to return from a directors' meeting at the Trust Company.

After explaining the delay she said: "This is Mr. Evans, is n't it? I have often had you pointed out to me. Were n't you at Narragansett Pier last summer?"

"Yes, for a while," said Evans, admiring the beauty of the girl, and from sheer force of habit, wondering what she wanted of him; for people always wanted something from him, high and low, rich and poor, men and women.

"Father seems rather worried over this franchise ques-

tion; how is it coming out?" she ventured to ask, for she had an intuitive feeling that the visit of this man to her home boded good to no one.

"Oh, all right, I think; the only opponent seriously to be feared is young Mr. Price, of the 'News,'" and, though Evans was looking at her keenly, he lacked the key to the problem and was, for once, off his guard. Vivian was something of a politician herself, in her own kingdom, and was now gifted with a quickness of apprehension abnormally keen.

"You will dispose of him easily enough, I presume," she said with well assumed carelessness.

"We do not look for much difficulty," returned Evans with a pleasant smile, for this girl was fair to see; but in his look somewhere there was a coldness, a non-moral callousness that seemed to freeze something in her as she detected its presence.

"Well, good luck to you," she said, with a light laugh, "here comes papa," and she hurried from the room a prey to indefinite fears and a dull foreboding of approaching evil.

The men retired to her father's private study and were long closeted together. What were they talking about? Vivian paced the hall restlessly and finally took a seat in the glass inclosed veranda, by the front door, where she could watch for Evans's departure and demand an explanation of her father, as soon as the man had gone.

Everett had returned from the directors' meeting with a "noon edition" in his hand, wherein he had read an article that much disturbed him. The substance of the article was that the Republican caucus, called for that evening, in the Seventeenth Ward, which was to be held for the purpose of selecting a candidate to contest the coming special election, was not going to be the tame, cut and dried affair every one had expected in a machine stronghold where the nomination was equivalent to election. It appeared that an organization of workingmen and small taxpayers, suddenly formed to meet the emergency, had prevailed upon Editor Price to make the contest against the machine, for the purpose of putting in office a man who could be trusted to lead the battle in the city council against the forces of the Carthage Electric. It appeared, further, that the ward committee in the Seventeenth, fearing possible defeat even in a ward where the organization had always reigned supreme, had refused to restrict votes at the caucus to those whose names appeared upon the poll lists, though such action was of questionable legality. It appeared that carry-alls, hay wagons, carts and drays, vehicles of all descriptions, had been hired by the machine workers to bring the faithful from all parts of the city to vote at the caucus.

On the other hand, the editor, as a counter move, had called a public mass meeting for seven o'clock that even-

ing to be held in an open square, near the polling place, where he proposed to make a public address. It was expected that this address would be followed, as far as his adherents were concerned, by a grand rush to the polls, with all the strength they could muster. It was suggested that Price, by this novel means, would vote a great concourse of people at the "unrestricted" caucus; and that more men would be drawn out to vote in this way than both party organizations, which were confessedly working together, would be able to bring to the caucus in a week.

"In a word," the article concluded, "the gallant editor of the 'News' has again proved himself more than a match, single handed, for the combined strength of all his powerful enemies."

"Nice situation, is it not?" queried Evans, pointing to the paper. "I'm glad you have read it, for it is what I came to see you about."

"Is this all true, or is it mostly reportorial effervescence?" queried Everett.

"I regret to say that it is all true, every word of it, and more besides. Price has broken with me, outright, and challenged me to do my worst. He is in the fight against us to stay."

"I was a little ashamed," said Everett, "to acknowledge how the fellow had beaten me; but now that I find

you, a veteran of a thousand caucuses, in imminent danger of defeat, I do not feel so dreadfully cheap about it."

"I am afraid we must come to it, Everett," said Evans, in a hard voice. The men had for some time been considering measures, desperate expedients they hesitated to adopt save in dire extremity.

Everett arose and paced the room, then went to the window and threw it wide open for a breath of air; his thoughts suffocated him. The window looked out upon the closed veranda where Vivian was waiting to see her father immediately upon the politician's departure. She could n't help hearing what followed, and she certainly made no effort to do so; it concerned her and hers too vitally.

"I am afraid delay is no longer possible," sighed Everett, "and that further effort at compromise is futile. The man has rejected all our offers, one after another; he is absolutely impracticable."

"He is the first man I ever met that was so," said Evans. "I have let things run along, confident that, in the end, his weak point would be found."

"We have tried him at every turn," added Everett, still apologizing for himself to himself, rather than to the politician. "I have even brought influences to bear that I should blush to mention." (Vivian certainly blushed, if her father did n't.)

"The worst of it is," continued Evans, "that, owing to the delay, matters have come to such a pass it is only by employing drastic measures we can still hope to save the day."

"I suppose so," said Everett, gloomily.

"Two results must be accomplished. First, Price must not be suffered to write another editorial for the 'News' or have anything to do with its management, until this controversy is forever at an end."

"That is my part of the compact," assented Everett.

"Second," continued Evans, "he must not be allowed to speak at the mass meeting this evening, in the Seventeenth Ward; and the crowd that assembles must be dispersed by the police. That is my part of the job, Mr. Everett."

"I suppose it is necessary," said the banker, ruefully.

"Essential. It is not necessary, however, to discuss the details," said Thomas Evans, significantly.

"It is impossible to discuss details," replied the co-conspirator.

The two men separated, feeling like thieves in the night.

When Vivian left the veranda her face was pale, her teeth were clenched, and her eyes shining with peculiar light. Price was to have one ally, at least, upon whom no one had counted.

They were not wicked men, as men go. Honesty and

knavery, high-mindedness and meanness, cruelty and kindness, have their part in all of us, in varying proportions. Everett, Bleeker, Parkerson, Evans, Dean, were not bad men; they were simply limbs of a great, soulless thing, built by human cunning, clothed with personality by human law, but quite beyond the power of human law or human cunning to control. Like the monster of the wretched "Frankenstein," constructed on the pattern of man, possessed of superhuman strength and power, it was conscienceless, remorseless, unchecked by fear of punishment, human or divine, insatiable in greed, grown fat on public spoil. It is not the little men of our story, with their hesitations and regrets, not Evans, not Everett, not Bleeker nor Dean, but the great Carthage Electric dragon, that is preparing to bury its claws in the heart of John Price, and break him, crush him, hide him out of sight. He has challenged it to deadly combat, and it is preparing to spring.

CHAPTER XIV

A BLUE JAY

"IF a woman is inclined to be kittenish you can reckon she has passed the first blush of youth; young girls are always grave and stately," declared Archie Dean. He was sitting in his office discoursing on his favorite theme to Professor DuBois. "Think what a glorious achievement it would be," he continued, "to reduce our information concerning women to the formulas of an exact science; to arrange them, classify them, analyze microscopically their thoughts and feelings, expound their intuitions, explain their inconsistencies, and set the limits at which exact knowledge concerning these matters must verge into hypothesis, hypothesis degenerate into vague speculation, and mere speculation finally dissipate into the unknown and the unknowable."

"Why is it," asked DuBois, "that a maiden aunt is always an authority on the way to bring up children; and a bachelor always knows so much more about women than a married man?"

"I can defend the bachelor, but I cannot undertake the case of the maiden aunt without a retainer," retorted Mr. Dean, quite forgetting that he was soon to be dis-

qualified from expressing a representative opinion on the former proposition.

"You doubtless have evolved a theory of parental discipline yourself," suggested the professor, who liked nothing better than to stir up Dean in this fashion and hear him "drule."

"Not at all," disclaimed Archie, with becoming modesty, "my only interest in the youngsters has been philosophical. I have long been endeavoring to fix the point at which the boy and girl begin to differentiate in character."

"And have you found it?"

"Oh, it is not so easy to determine. The boy puts aside his doll when he dons his trousers; the girl clings to hers far into her teens. The boy first asserts his manhood by objecting to being kissed. And the girl — well, a girl never really objects to it, time and circumstance being wholly propitious."

"What heresy!"

"Not at all; plain fact. But to resume: masculine nature is naturally frank and open; but the little girl must have her secrets. The desire to be incomprehensible develops early. Of course the secrets do not amount to anything. Oh, the little whisperings and laughings and mysterious glances! How tantalizing they are to the curiosity of her small brother. One of my most valuable discoveries is that curiosity in the male rises

to a pitch it never reaches in the female creature. On the other hand, little girls, one and all, cling to their childish fancies. They pretend that they believe in Santa Claus long after their brothers have detected and acclaimed the pious fraud. Their 'Snow Images' are never melted. For them a thousand 'Little Elsie's' are building swans' nests by the river, a thousand 'Little Alices' are burrowing with rabbits or stepping through the looking-glass into a fantastic world, quite hidden from our imagination."

"There, I'll go before you spoil it," cried DuBois, from his stand by the window. "That was unusually favorable to the 'sex,' and, if I am not mistaken, one of the prettiest girls in Carthage is on her way up to your office. Yes, she has come into this building."

"Nonsense, my female clients are all good and clever, and as a necessary result, or rather, cause, not one of them can claim to be a beauty."

"Well, good-bye; as soon as you have placed that loan for me, let me know."

"Certainly; good-bye."

So Professor DuBois met Vivian Everett in the hall-way outside Dean's office. "You have come at a bad time," said he. "Archie is in one of his woman-hating fits; I never knew his malady to be so virulent."

"Oh, I am not afraid of Archie," laughed Vivian;

"he has analyzed me and philosophized over me and cross-questioned me ever since I was a little girl."

"Then this absurd talk of his is all pure affectation?" queried DuBois.

"Oh, that's his fad just now. He fancies it makes him interesting."

"I guess you are a match for him," said the professor, as he passed on to the elevator. "In more ways than one," he added to himself. "There is a girl bright enough to fence with Archie's wit, and fully capable of taking the nonsense out of him. I should like to see Archie Dean really earnestly and honestly in love with such a girl; it would be the making of him;" and Professor DuBois merely voiced the unanimous sentiment of the four hundred of Carthage. If their friends could have had their way about it, Archie and Vivian would have been married for some time.

"Why, Vivian," exclaimed Archie, springing to his feet as she entered, "I'm mighty glad to see you this morning. It is not often that a blue jay flies in at my office window and perches among my dusty law books."

"The only resemblance that I bear to a blue jay is that I'm all of a flutter," replied Vivian, sinking into a chair, and surveying the office with no little curiosity, for it was her first visit there in all the years she and Dean had known each other.

A bust of Shakespeare faced the attorney from the shelf of his roller-top desk upon which his papers were arranged with precise neatness. The floor was polished and covered with an elegant rug; a library of well assorted digests, reports, and legal text-books lined the wall, where space was also found for fine portraits of Blackstone, Kent, and Marshall, for Archie was a scholarly dilettant in jurisprudence rather than a bustling man of affairs.

"And what is the cause of the blue jay's flutter?" he asked, with a grave smile.

"What do you want to talk about us girls so for, especially now you are engaged?" returned Vivian, with a woman's inconsequence. "I met Professor DuBois in the hall and you had so upset the poor man with your meanderings that he seemed to think you capable of devouring the first woman you met."

"It is evident he did not succeed in frightening you away, I'm glad to see."

"Now, Archie, how long are you going to keep up this silly fad? If you only knew how ridiculous it makes you!"

Archie winced. Even the pseudo-woman-hater disliked to be considered ridiculous. "I never saw a woman yet who was grateful for being entertained," he grumbled. "If a man can only make her think that he is proud and haughty, she will idealize him. When she finds that he

is but common clay, after all, she will blame him for the disappointment."

"And she has a right to be disappointed, has n't she?"

"If I cannot live up to my own ideals, how the mischief can I ever expect to live up to yours, Vivian?"

"Well, well, don't suppose I came down to your office this morning on purpose to scold you. I came to see you on — on a matter of — of business."

"You know well enough that I will do anything in the world for you, always," replied Dean with a shade of sentiment, forgetting for the moment that he had ceased to belong to Vivian Everett and was now the exclusive property of Electa Chalmers; so, falling from sheer force of habit into the customary attitude of devotion, he took a seat by her side and sought to clasp her hand, but she drew it away and rebuked him sharply. "Can't you keep Electa in mind for even half an hour?" she demanded, almost contemptuously, for this young man often vexed her to the very soul in spite of his many redeeming qualities.

"Of course, I forgot," protested Archie, ruefully. "The fact is, I've been engaged to her for so short a time, and I have been for so long a time on the verge of being engaged to you, that I can't become accustomed to the situation all at once. Can't we get used to the change gradually, Vivian?" he questioned, comically.

"No, we can't, and there must n't be anything more of

the sort between us; but we can still be good friends and help one another, can we not?"

"Of course," assented Dean, wondering what it was all about.

"Then I am going to put you to the test at once. I wish to talk with you about — about Mr. Price."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Archie, scenting trouble in the wind and sitting bolt upright as he prepared himself to meet the emergency.

"You know all about it already," she continued. "You know what a struggle Mr. Price is having to pay for the 'News.' You know how he lives in constant fear of not being able to raise the money in time to meet his contract with that horrid, grasping old uncle of yours. You know the way he has been fighting for what he believes to be right, against what papa says are desperate odds. You know, too, what powerful enemies he must have made. You know, or can guess, that he has risked his little all, and has undertaken this brave endeavor, because, because, —"

"Why, just because," helped out Archie.

"Now you know, also, that my Uncle Plympton left me a lot of money, and that it is all my own, to do just as I please with."

"Yes, and I know that Jack Price would never accept a cent of it, or he is n't the man I take him for."

"Of course he would n't. What an idea! Now, Archie, I have been brought up a business man's daughter, and I am not a fool. What I wish to do is simply this: I wish to deposit with you, unknown to Mr. Price, or any one else — any one else, you understand — a sufficient sum of money to cover any possible shortage or delay in Mr. Price's payments. He need never know it. You can simply take this worry off his mind by altering the contract so that, should he fail to make the payment in the time required, the option, I think that is what it is called, need not expire. You can do all that on the ground of personal friendship, so long as your uncle will be perfectly secure."

"Whew!" whistled Dean. "Vivian, you are a shrewd girl and clever, but have you any notion of the sum that will be necessary?"

"Certainly. Mr. Price pays \$2,000 a month. I heard him tell papa so. It is a simple matter of reckoning. There are three or four payments to make before he secures his new contract. I can count that up on my fingers, if I *am* a girl. That makes, at the most, eight thousand dollars. Under these circumstances, I came to the conclusion that twelve thousand dollars ought to be ample security."

"And have you such a sum as that to deposit?"

"Yes, and plenty besides. I raised that much on

some securities this morning. I knew that it would be embarrassing to both of us to have you cash my check for such an amount; so I brought the money with me in my shopping-bag."

"And your father? What will he say?"

"Papa will know nothing about it; the money is mine. I am of age, and, and it is none of papa's business."

"Legally, no; but on every other consideration it is most decidedly his business."

"It is n't any use to quibble, Archie. I have thought it all over and made up my mind, and you know what happens when I make up my mind."

"I should say I did," returned Mr. Dean, with affected terror. "But has it occurred to you, Vivian, that this unexpected move of yours may interfere with some of your father's most cherished business calculations?"

Vivian smiled demurely. "I have taken pains not to know anything definite about papa's intentions, but it would not disturb me at all if I should happen, accidentally, to be getting the best of him."

"But does it also occur to you that I cannot receive this deposit without first consulting the party principally interested, John Price?"

"If you should ever whisper a word about it to Mr. Price, Archie Dean, I will never speak to you, look at

you, stay in the same room, in the same house, on the same street with you, as long as I live."

"Yet that would be my clear duty before I could permit such an arrangement."

"And I thought I could trust you. I thought you were my friend."

"So I am," insisted her quondam chattel, firmly. "So much your friend that I will not permit you to commit any such act of folly."

"Do you mean to say that if I were Mr. Everett's son and not his daughter, and thought it best to make such an arrangement as I have just now proposed, you would refuse to let me?"

"A man would never do anything so sweetly quixotic."

"Then it is because I am a woman?"

"Yes," admitted Dean, brusquely. (It had to serve for want of a better pretext.)

Vivian sought her pocket handkerchief and began to sob.

Archie wavered. "See here, Vivian, don't take it that way. I would do anything for you in the world except allow you to compromise yourself."

"You — you would do — anything for me — except what I want — you to do — for me." (More sobs.)

"Oh, come, now, give me a little more time to think it over," temporized Dean, playing desperately for delay.

"Come around this afternoon about, say about half-past five, and I will see what I can do about it."

The pocket handkerchief was restored to its receptacle, and Vivian departed with beaming smiles. She had her doubts but had done the best she could and must wait until she could make another effort to bring her ex-chattel to time.

Vivian knew her father, and was well aware how swiftly and deftly he was accustomed to act when opposed in a matter of business. She was aware of his friendship with ex-Congressman Parkerson, of his power in a business way over Archie Dean; and she had distinct warning that his first step would be to have Price turned out of the "News" before he could make further opposition to the franchise grab.

Knowing that there was no time to be lost she had hastened to see Dean, and exert her own power over one whom she had always found so pliable to her every whim.

CHAPTER XV

A PILOT FOR PIRATES

ARCHIE DEAN was in a serious quandary. He found himself face to face with one of those dilemmas where it seems impossible to be wholly true to any one, where any feasible course had something of bad faith and treachery in it. He had long been a friend of Price; he was engaged to marry the editor's cousin, whom he had come to love, in spite of all his flippancy of speech and manner. He was bound to Vivian by long established ties of mutual trust and confidence.

On the other hand he was his uncle's attorney, in full charge of the great Parkerson estate, with all its varied financial interests, and bound to carry out faithfully orders and instructions as his uncle's agent and *alter ego*. He was closely associated in business with Nathan Everett and all the other directors of the Carthage Electric Company, of which he was one of the chief attorneys. To betray the interests they had intrusted to him would destroy his *status*, both as a lawyer and as a gentleman.

If he took Vivian's money, tendered on behalf of John Price, every shadow of pretext for the blow the Carthage

Electric Company was preparing to strike would be removed. Good faith to Vivian and Price demanded its acceptance; good faith to his clients required the course he had finally adopted; and he sat hating himself, as Vivian disappeared. It was therefore in no very cheerful mood that he met the young lady's father a few minutes later.

"The time has come when the Carthage Electric must crush John Price or itself go to the wall," announced the banker, as soon as Dean's office door was fairly closed behind him.

"I was afraid matters must soon reach that crisis," said Dean, "and I saved you all from disaster only this morning."

"How is that?"

"Why, strangely enough, just as everything was ready to move, a friend of Price's walks into my office and planks down on my desk twelve thousand dollars, in cold cash, to cover any possible delays or shortage on the part of Price."

"Whew!" whistled Everett.

"I was at my wits' end; but on one pretext or another I managed to put the fellow off until half-past five this afternoon. It is lucky you are ready for action at once. Another day's delay would be fatal."

"Who was it?"


"I cannot tell you."

"Nonsense, man, this is no time for ordinary scruples. We must fight with all eyes open. If Price has money backing it is absolutely necessary that we should know where it comes from, what its strength is, and how best to reach the man or men behind him. I have not heard anything for a long time that has given me such concern; that has been his one weakness and our only superior source of strength, — money."

"I can't help it, Everett, that is one thing you must find out for yourself," said Dean, highly amused at the curious by-play between father and daughter, and not at all sorry to let the banker do a little worrying.

"But I insist," cried Everett, tensely; "do you understand me? I insist."

"Look here, Everett," protested Dean, "I am not a man of many scruples; I could n't very well be such with the clients I have; I was brought up on the somewhat ambiguous aphorism, 'business is business.' It was fed to me with the milk from my bottle. I have most explicit instructions from my uncle, Parkerson, to stand by you as against Price, even to a high-handed breach of contract; but the job, while defensible on business principles, is not to my liking, and might be called a good many nasty names. It seems mighty like selling out a friend under cover of a retainer from the Carthage Electric."



"What! You are not going to back out?"

"Not in the least. I will not desert my flag, even if it has a skull and crossbones on it; but I tell you, Mr. Everett, your retainer does n't cover confidential communications from another client. The backer of Price is also a client of mine." Dean was experiencing all the difficulties of the man who seeks to serve two masters.

"Well, well, say no more about it. Let us get through with our job and have no more talk," said Nathan Everett, impatiently, for the lawyer's finical scruples irritated and alarmed him.

"With all my heart. As arranged, I closed my office yesterday afternoon; so, when Price came around with his payment, I was not there to receive it, thus forcing him to let the matter go until to-day, which is a technical breach of his contract. This morning I did another clever stroke of work for you by putting off his backer. I have here the transfer of my uncle's entire interest in the 'News' to the Carthage Electric Street Railway Company. Make out your check for fifty thousand dollars and sign this contract, which provides, in substance, that you hold us harmless from any and all law-suits or claims for damages on the part of Price; and the stock is yours."

"Very well, that is entirely satisfactory, provided you can deliver the 'News' establishment into the hands of my men before eight o'clock to-morrow morning."

"We will take possession of the place at six o'clock this evening, and our men will be instructed to deliver over possession to you at quarter past six."

The papers were signed without further parley, and the pair went out to make further arrangements with those employed for the work. Everett and Evans then held a conference with the new men engaged respectively as editor and business manager of the "News."

No other changes in the force were contemplated. The other employees of the establishment it was judged, and judged rightly, would be only too glad to hold their positions; and would, of stern necessity, serve their new masters with the same talent and zeal with which they were now serving Price. The man who earns his bread and butter on a daily newspaper is bought and sold as part and parcel of its machinery. The only man who could not be bought and sold with his paper was Price himself. And so, as the only possible reward of his courage and independence, he must go to earn his bread and butter elsewhere, as best he might.

Price had already left the office that afternoon, when Dean's men arrived, and they took possession of the "News" without a contest. At the time appointed the representatives of the new proprietor arrived, conferred with the employees who had not already left the establishment, and passed the evening in Price's editorial room

calmly smoking their predecessor's tobacco while making plans for the new policy of the paper.

Sam and several other reporters were sent for in the course of the evening, and informed of the new order of things. They had no alternative, and accepted the situation as calmly as they had, half a dozen times before, when the "News" had changed proprietors and policy or politics. In the course of its parti-colored career it had shifted from Democratic to Republican, back to Democratic again; under Price it had been aggressively Independent, and now it was to continue its course as he might have continued it had he been willing to join hands with the corporation which was seeking to secure from the city the street railway franchise for its own purposes, and at its own figure.

It was the first of November. The sun was already down and Carthage was wrapped in a fall fog, through which the electric bulbs shone with pearl-like lustre, dotting Main Street with a necklace of gleaming light.

It was nearly half-past five when Vivian Everett left her carriage and entered the elevator of the Parkerson Bank building. The offices on the sixth floor were all closed excepting that of Dean, which stood at the farther end of the long corridor. No one had thought to turn on the electric lights in the hallway so early in the evening, and there was a darkness and stillness in the big office building which contrasted strongly with the hurry and bustle of

the crowds surging in and out of the elevator, and all the other scenes of thronging life which had marked the place when Vivian was there in the morning. Perhaps it was this, and perhaps it was something in Archie's face, or both in combination, which made Miss Everett exclaim, the moment she entered his office: "Archie Dean, something has gone wrong. Don't deny it. I know it just as well as if you had told me."

"What makes you think so?"

"Why, because, —"

"If you ask a woman to explain her feelings, and she answers, 'because,' it means she has been having an intuition."

"Do not try to put me off in that way. I am tired of lectures on the shortcomings of my sex. Something is the matter, and I insist on knowing just what it is."

"When a woman has an intuition, as I was about to remark, there is but one course open to the masculine mind, and that is, to agree with her instantly. Why, Vivian, if you had an intuition that the moon was made of green cheese, I should at once trot out a chafing-dish and a bottle of ale and prepare my palate for a Welsh rarebit."

"I will not laugh at you, Archie, and I am tired of scolding you. I have been fuming and fretting all day, and worrying until I am completely used up. You have given

me the most miserable day of my life and I do not thank you for it. You put me off this morning with impertinent insinuations about my conduct towards Mr. Price, and talked about my compromising myself, and all that, — when you know perfectly well that I do not care for him more than I do for any other struggling young man that a person with money might be interested in and help, and, — ”

“Now, for goodness’ sake, Vivian, do not work yourself up into another crying spell,” cried Dean, with unusual brusqueness. “You know well enough that I cannot stand it. I see through the game all the while, but it fetches me just the same.”

“You are hard and cruel, with all your fine talk, and fine theories and fine manners, Archie, hard and cruel. I turn to you for help in a bitter emergency and you put me off with an affectation, which may be amusing talk of an idle evening; but when real trials and troubles come to one, you are not much of a man, Archie Dean. You pretend to think that I was acting this morning, and should I cry now, you would affect to believe that it was just a woman’s trick. Look at these tears on my face; I cannot manufacture these, can I? You do not care for them. It is only when I make a noise, like a child, that it concerns you; not when I suffer the wretchedness of real grief. I have been perfectly miserable all day, Archie Dean, and

the one friend I thought I had in the world does n't care that — " (snapping her little fingers with a gesture of despair).

"By George, I did n't bargain for this," muttered Dean. "Vivian, poor little Vivian, this is going to come harder on you than I ever dreamed possible."

"Well, then, tell me about it. Can't you see that it is the suspense that is killing me?"

"Oh, hum, heigh-ho; well, you will have to be told by some one, sooner or later, and will probably hear it from half a dozen sources to-morrow morning, as I wish to God you might, rather than from me. The fact is, Vivian, that acting under most explicit directions from Uncle Parker-son, I have been obliged to sell the 'News' to the Carthage Electric for the reason that Mr. Price has broken his contract with us."

"And when did you sell it?"

"The deal was not fully consummated until this afternoon."

"And I was in time this morning?"

"Yes, if I had been willing to allow it. Even as it is, should you choose to tell Mr. Price about it, and should he ratify your tender, it would help him very much in the suit for damages he is sure to bring."

Vivian Everett turned upon the lawyer with a light in her eyes and an expression on her face he had never seen

before. There was something almost tigerish in it. Did he know this girl? Had he ever known her, he was asking himself.

"Oh, indeed," she said. "A nice, brave, honest piece of business this. Acting under most explicit instructions from your Uncle Parkerson, you have sold out your friend; that is about the way the matter stands, is it not, Archie Dean?"

"I have done nothing that any lawyer would not pronounce perfectly honest and honorable," shuffled Archie, desperately endeavoring to defend a false position.

"And Mr. Price? What will he do? What will you say to him? I suppose you will say: 'Acting under most explicit instructions from my uncle, I have sold you out, Mr. Price. You thought me your friend; I encouraged you to buy the "News" when no one else would touch it, and to risk every dollar you had in the world in it, Mr. Price. As soon as you made the property valuable by your honesty, industry, and fearlessness, I acted under most explicit instructions from my uncle, and sold you out, Mr. Price. And there is not a lawyer or business man in the city of Carthage, who will not pronounce the transaction perfectly fair and honorable, Mr. Price.'"

"You make me feel like a contemptible scoundrel, when I know I am nothing of the sort," pleaded Dean. "It is useless to try to make you understand it. I never saw a

woman yet, no matter how much she might think she knew about business, who would n't fly off at the handle, just like that."

"That is so like you, Archie," stormed Vivian. "You have reached a point where you try to excuse any sort of selfishness and wickedness on the score of the manifold shortcomings of us women. I could see from your face that you had done something that you were at heart ashamed of, and when I asked you about it you made some fine remarks about a woman's intuitions. I reproach you for allowing yourself to play a part peculiarly mean and unworthy; and you defend yourself on the ground that I am a woman, and must be expected to misunderstand things and 'fly off at the handle.' I try to save a poor young man from being ruined by my own father; and you reply that I must consult my parents, before I am permitted to do, with my own money, what seems to me just and right, because, forsooth, I am a woman, a woman, a woman!"

"Your own father? Hum! So you know that?"

"Yes, Archie, I know that."

"Well, Vivian, you have given me great relief. I have longed to tell you, explicitly, that you were running against your father's dearest business interests in this matter; that his whole fortune was at stake in it; that the fine clothes you wear, the carriages you drive in, the house you live in, all, all were dependent upon the result of this

franchise controversy. I could not do this without betraying your father's confidence. But, nevertheless, I am glad to be aware that you have learned, in some way, that it is Nathan Everett that to-day took possession of the 'News,' and that it is the hand of your own father that will shut its doors in the face of John Price, to-morrow morning." Dean said this with an air of triumph, believing that the worldly considerations which had forced him to do what he had regarded as a disagreeable duty would be equally potent with this woman of his caste, whose ideals and training had been essentially the same as his own; but once more he failed to understand or appreciate the change which had been swiftly altering the warp and woof of her being.

"And do you think that I am proud of it? That I could find in my own selfish interests or welfare palliation for the wrong and outrage done in the name of insatiable greed?" cried the girl, with flashing eyes. "I'd rather eat crusts and go in rags than wear fine gowns and live in luxury as the result of such iniquitous practices."

"All that is highly melodramatic, — but it is n't like you, Vivian," said Dean, with an unpleasant laugh. "Can't you see, my dear girl, what all this is coming to? If your friend, Mr. Price, should succeed in what he is trying to do, and prevent the company from securing the franchise, your father would be a bankrupt, your mother without a

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dollar, and all that would be left of the family fortune would be the money you yourself received from Mr. Plympton, which, I imagine, while a very fair sum for pin-money, and perhaps a large fortune to a girl in ordinary circumstances, would scarcely maintain the Everett establishment for a single year."

"And do you think that should alter the case, make wrong into right and set to rest all scruple? Why should I use soft words about it, or call what is black and ugly, fair, — oh, everything is more horrid, more desperately wicked than I believed possible. How is it all going to end?"

"Better than you imagine," asserted Dean, with mollifying air. "Of course Price must go under, poor fellow. We can't help that, though we will doubtless find some way to square things with him afterwards. It is a pity it has to be done, but there is no other way out of it. Your father was no end sorry. He made all sorts of offers, offers which would have made John Price a rich man, had he seen fit to accept them; we were ready to do anything to prevent the catastrophe; but the situation became so bad the blow had to be struck, and struck all the harder and more cruelly for the delay."

"What shall I do, what shall I do?" mourned Vivian, quite unconsoled by anything Dean had been able to say.

"Do? Why, go home, like a good girl, and let things

take their course. You can make your friends and your parents miserable by delivering bitter speeches at them, but you cannot mend things by that."

The rush of the elevator was heard in the still hall without, and a step was sounding at the farther end of the corridor.

"That must be Price," said Dean.

"Goodness, he must not find me here," exclaimed the girl.

"Step into my private office, quick."

Vivian vanished before the words were well out of his mouth, for, as the door of the private office closed upon her retreating figure, Price stepped quickly in from the hall.

CHAPTER XVI

A BUNDLE OF MYRRH

BLISSFULLY unconscious of the impending *dé-bacle*, filled with the pride of achievement, and inspired by the excitement of controversy, John Price made his way to the office of Archie Dean to present his check for two thousand dollars one day too late.

"Ah, Dean," he exclaimed, as he entered, "I am glad to find you in to-night. I came at the usual hour, yesterday afternoon, prepared to meet the payment according to our contract, but you had disappeared, and I was unable to find you at your rooms later in the evening. I am sorry for the delay, but it is hardly my fault. Here is your check. It was a tight squeeze this month, — in fact I had to delay some other necessary payments in order to get the cash together."

"I closed my office a little before the usual hour yesterday, but I was here for the greater part of the day ready to receive the money at any time," said Dean, as coldly as he could. Price did not have Vivian's intuitive sense, and still suspected nothing.

"Why, you know as well as I that I cannot leave the

'News' office, before four o'clock at the very earliest," he said. "I have never come before that hour, and we have both agreed that it was safer not to send any one with so large an amount, especially in view of the strict conditions of the contract."

"But it is risky to leave so important a payment until the very last moment," suggested Dean, wondering where he was going to find words to tell the plain facts of the situation.

"Perhaps, — were I dealing with an enemy, — but you have often assured me I need not worry, were I a week behindhand," returned the editor.

"That was before there were so many men after the 'News.' You know well enough, Price, that ever since you stirred up such a muss, there have been two or three large aggregations of capital seeking to buy you off, or, failing that, to buy out your paper."

"Certainly, but as long as I made my payments as agreed I knew there was no danger. I have had pretty anxious times raising the money, but I have never had one moment's doubt of your good faith, old man. Somehow you know, when one has been camping with a fellow, has slept on the ground beside him under the same blanket, sheltered from the rain by the same tent; or, on pleasant nights, lain out in the open, under a starlit caravansary, one grows to know a man pretty well; but I'm getting

poetical, am I not? Why, Dean, I'd trust you with my every dollar and know that my money was as safe as though invested in United States government bonds."

"This comes of mixing business and friendship, Price. I cannot let you go on. Every word has a knife-blade in it. You must be aware, by failing to make your payment yesterday, that, technically, your contract was at an end, and that we were entitled to full possession immediately under our chattel mortgage and the provisions of the contract."

"Of course, of course."

"Well, that is exactly what we have felt obliged to do."

"I see, ha, ha, ha, — good joke. Why, I left the 'News' only a half an hour ago, and she was all safe and sound as a whistle; I am not a bit worried about you. Here, take your old money. I must be off; supper is waiting for me."

"Was there ever a fellow so stupidly blind? Why, man, see here, this is the check from the Carthage Electric for fifty thousand dollars, in full payment for my uncle's interest in the 'News.' It was given me this afternoon. It is now six, and by this time they are in possession of the 'News' office. At this very moment they are in the act of installing the new manager and editors."

Price gave one look at the check, a second at Dean's countenance, and then fell back as if he had been struck in the face.

There was silence for the longest sixty seconds of Archie Dean's life. He could hear, though Price did not, a soft sobbing in the next room, behind the door against which Price was at that very moment leaning heavily, trying to grasp the reality of the thing.

"Brace up, man," Dean said, at last, simply because he could not endure the silence any longer. "Do not take it so to heart. My instructions from my uncle were positive. Everett was offering in cash what it would take you five years to pay, and my uncle needed the money; there was no alternative."

"Well, Mr. Dean, I shall not reproach you. You lawyers have your own code of honor, you know, — legal honor, I think you call it. I have no especial claim on you, or on any one else, — or any one else."

"Why, the fact is, Price, you are the only one in the world to blame. Now, what did you care about this blamed franchise? Whether it was sold for a song or a million? You loved a rich girl, and were making a strike to win her. Inside of three months you had as many chances, not to sell the paper, but to have it given to you outright, as a present. You threw away every opportunity as fast as it was offered; and now you think it hard because my uncle is not as blind to his interests as you were to yours."

"I could never make you understand, Mr. Dean, how a man like me, brought up as I have been, would rather die

a pauper than make a million and marry the sweetest girl in the world, when the bargain meant that he must sell out — body and soul — to the highest bidder. As I said, I could not make you understand these things, if I should talk a year. We have been brought up differently, that is all. I will not quarrel with you because you acted according to your notions of legal duty and legal right. On the other hand, please do not find fault with me, because I have acted up to the principles which I have been accustomed to regard as those of manly honor and manly right."

Dean swore internally at himself, his uncle, Everett, Vivian, and the Carthage Electric Company. "What are you going to do now?" he asked. "You know that you can rely on me to do anything in the world I can for you."

"No, Mr. Dean, you cannot expect that. I may not blame you, but you can hardly expect me to rely upon you."

"And Vivian? Can't you say a word that I can take to her? You can well imagine that she will be confoundedly cut up about this business," urged Dean, hoping that the girl in the adjoining office might hear something that would give her comfort.

"Yes," said Price, gulping down a lump in his throat, "yes, I suppose, she will pity me, but she will not understand me. None of you people can do that, not one of you. Why, Dean, you call yourselves, all of you, citizens of Carthage, but there is not one of you that has any claim on


her. You don't know Carthage, you people, you don't care a rap about her, except to bleed her. It is different with me. I know every street and just what the people living on it had to pay for the pavement. I know the people who are paying the taxes and struggling to hold their little equities in their homes, and pay your banks and trust companies the interest on their mortgages. I know the people upon whom an inexorable law shifts all of the burdens of taxation, — all of them. I know all our parks and our bridges and our fine public buildings, and just how much was grafted when they were purchased or built and who footed the bills.

“No, you people are not citizens of Carthage, you live in a little town of your own, quite distinct and walled off from the rest of the city. Knowing these things, feeling as I do, I should be the meanest scoundrel unhung, if I should build a fine house on Chester Avenue and take a present of a newspaper, in order that Carthage might be filched and plundered and robbed.

“You think you have closed my mouth, you and your Carthage Electric Company, but you have only opened it the wider. You can't buy truth, you can't bribe her, you can't shut her up in a box. You may harness Niagara, but you can't dam into a stagnant pool the eternally flowing river of truth. I am going to have something to say to the citizens of Carthage in the Seventeenth Ward this evening,

right out in the open; and they shall hear it; they shall hear it, unless the Carthage Electric Company buys up the sky over my head, sells out the ground from under my feet, levies on the circulating medium of the air between my throat and the people's ears, forecloses a chattel mortgage on the iridescence of the stars, filches the light of the moon, and fixes a sheriff's padlock on the very atmosphere of God."

John Price, thus delivering his pent-up emotions, reeled out of Dean's office like a drunken man, staggered along the gloomy corridor, past the row of dark and silent offices, to the corner of the staircase. There he stopped, buried his head in his hands, and leaned against the wall. Bravely as he had faced it out before Dean, he had suffered a cruel blow. The "News" was his child, his thought, his life. Into the paper he had put the sinew of his brain. Its office had been his home from boyhood. He had followed, as a part of its machinery, through its many changes of management. At last it had been his, — his to build up and make a power in the community. He had made it feared and respected; he had sought to win, in honor and truth, with his crest untarnished, a place in the world which he might with pride invite any woman to share; and he hoped that there was a woman ready to accept this place when he had won it. Suddenly the dragon he had defied had sprung upon him, and with one blow of its steel-shod claw



had swept him off his charger and laid him in the dust.

Tears were ground out of his eyes in his mental anguish. Not women's tears, born of weakness and delicately strung nerves, not these, but the kind of tears men weep, which flow more bitterly than blood, furrow the cheek with wrinkles as they fall, build crow's-feet about the eyes, and leave an indelible imprint on the countenance, — thus a strong man weeps.

Vivian had heard all, and her tender sympathies went out in pity to the bitter and disappointed man, whose best powers and most earnest efforts were bent upon purposes which she fully understood meant destruction to her father's fortune and her home. She shuddered at the fierce tirade against her father's company with which young Price had departed; and, as soon as he was gone, she hastened once more to try to secure comfort, consolation, and advice from Archie Dean.

But that gentleman was in no condition to aid her, or to make any suggestion as to what she should do. He could not even fortify himself with a single droll remark about the inconsistencies of the female sex. He sat at his desk, both hands under his chin, and his eyes fixed upon the ceiling, with a perplexed and abstracted stare.

"What in the world shall I do, Archie?" she cried; "what is there left for me to do in this wretched business?"

"Do something, Vivian, and do it quick," cried Dean, desperately, "this situation is impossible."

"But what — what?"

"How the deuce should I know? The thing is quite out of the range of my abilities or experience. I feel that I am too small a man for my own shoes."

Vivian stood a moment, wringing her hands, helplessly, and then, as it was evident that her one sympathizer was even more helpless than herself, she gathered up her shopping-bag, which still held the poor little twelve thousand dollars she had been so ready to bestow, — and hurried out of the office, — not even taking the trouble to bid the recreant Archie good-night.

So it came about that Vivian passed along the dark hallway, by the silent offices, to the foot of the staircase. There the man she loved was standing, with his face against the wall, bleeding tears.

Now this was not a healthy sight for a young woman with tender sensibilities to see. She tried to pass by and escape to the elevator; but she could not. She was rooted to the spot by a power ever potent with woman, — the power of pitying love. Then a great wave of feeling swept over her, brushing aside all shrinking and all shame, all maiden pride, all form, convention, modest hesitation, instincts of concealment which rule a girl's life from the cradle, affection for parents, vanity of social estate, attrac-

tions of wealth, and the power of that kingdom of homage in which a woman of her caste is born to rule; all, all were burned away in the pure flame of that love which is the law of woman's life. So, filled to the soul with that which is the divinest gift of Heaven to man, she went to him, where he stood, with his face against the wall, and put both her arms softly about his neck, saying: "John, dear John, I'll stand by you, through everything, John, through everything, — for I love you, —"

So she laid her head on his shoulder, with her bright hair sweeping his cheek; in the depths of his despair he was given a glimpse of the green pastures and still waters that restore the soul, — for a vision of love and light, it all seemed to him, for the moment, in his dumb amazement, — one of those rare, blissful aberrations that had broken in upon him now and then, in the very midst of the bustling life of the "News" office.

But it was no dream, now, — of that he soon convinced himself as he clasped the sweet girl in his arms and pressed her to his heart, — crying: "I love you, too, darling, more than life itself!"

John Price was a man again, but a tenderer, truer man, blessed with a grace that should wait upon him all his days.

CHAPTER XVII

LOVE AT THE FOUNTAIN

LOVE plays all sorts of curious pranks, for Cupid is a traditional marplot and meddler and delights to concern himself with much that seems, at first blush, highly unromantic. Heroes and conquerors of old, kings, warriors, statesmen and politicians, have frequently found their most cherished schemes set awry by the mischievous manoeuvres of the blind god, so have bankers and shopkeepers and the *bourgeoisie* generally, for the prankish deity is no respecter of persons.

Does the paying teller make wrong change,—the sweet youth's in love. Does the drygoods clerk lose his place through the manipulations of a pretty shop-lifter, he's been entrapped in a syren snare. Does the cook burn the steak? She's doubtless dreaming of the policeman. Does the laundress scorch the linen? 'Tis love, burning love; and if, perchance, the whistling grocer's boy leaves our provender on the wrong doorstep, let us possess our souls in patience, and content ourselves with a "picked up dinner," for should we not go hungry when

the market boy's heart is famishing? 'T is but the same, dreamy old song, set to a fresh tune.

It should therefore be unnecessary to apologize because John Price and Vivian Everett chanced to find their love story inextricably entangled with questions of municipal policy and politics, and found it all highly interesting and deliciously romantic, wonderfully strange and new. Perhaps it was hardly fair that Price should be called upon to deliver a lecture upon topics that usually concern only the publicist, in the same breath with interchanging vows of loyalty and devotion, but such was the irony of fate. "*Quand on aime rien ne frivole;*" but, when one loves, nothing is unromantic.

From a worldly point of view he was at that moment a broken and ruined man, cast out of his paper, his life's savings lost in a disastrous venture, and deprived, for a time at least, of the very means of livelihood, and yet he was then and there called upon to assume a responsibility from which he might well shrink in cold blood when on the pinnacle of success, namely, that of engaging himself to marry a young woman reared in refined luxury; but when a man is theoretically bankrupt, he is prone to rely blindly on destiny and launch upon unwonted extravagance. It was typical of the wanton capers of fortune that fate should thrust Vivian Everett into his arms at the very moment when it seemed least likely that he

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could ever honorably ask such a woman to become his wife.

But the man who waits until it is wholly convenient to invite a young lady to share his hearthstone, if he has n't any other more valuable worldly possession, is apt to remain a bachelor.

Of course none of these doubts and difficulties here suggested occurred to John Price while he was clasping Vivian to his heart, there in the dark hallway of the Parkerson building, though they arose to oppress him afterwards heavily enough. Just then, arising from his apparent overthrow and rebounding to the heights of confident hope, he felt himself riding on the very crest of victory's wave.

But when the first great tide of love and sympathy had spent its force, Vivian looked about her in alarm. The long, dark corridor was silent enough, but there were lights in Dean's office and Archie was still there and might come out at any moment, and the elevator was rattling up and down near by, bearing departing clerks and stenographers from other floors of the building. It was far from a romantic or secluded spot, though it was here that the romance of their lives had reached its climax. At any moment they might be interrupted by a pert messenger boy or an inquisitive and saucy stenographer.

It was the young lady, naturally, who first awoke to

the unpleasantly public location fate had selected as the scene for their first declaration of love. "Now, John," she whispered, "don't look that way any more, look just like any ordinary mortal, for I am going to ring for the elevator."

So they descended to the street, and Price reluctantly escorted her to the carriage, — but the girl did n't propose to part from him like that. "Drive on, Henry," she said to the coachman, "I am going to walk home."

They strolled along together, side by side, their steps in sympathetic rhythm, and their finger tips now and then shyly touching, while they whispered to each other amid the rumble of vehicles and the strident gong of the electric cars.

As they left the business section and approached the residential district they passed through a small square where there was a fountain surrounded by rough wooden benches, where the babies of that unfashionable quarter were taken for an airing, though at this hour no one was loitering about.

"Let's sit down here for a few minutes," she suggested, "we have so much to say to each other."

So they sat there, side by side, listening to the tinkle of the fountain, which spurted from the mouth of a cast-iron swan whose neck was embraced by a chubby Cupid that must have weighed two hundred pounds and whose

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nose was red with rust. There were peanut shucks and brown paper bags and banana peelings scattered about, and the benches were carved with countless initials, and yet, to these two, this little patch of water and of green, in the heart of the tenement district, was a veritable garden of Aladdin, and they sat in silence, hand in hand, for nearly a quarter of an hour.

"Vivian, little Vivian," he whispered at length, "how can I tell you of the might and power of my love, dear? Because of it I am able to bear all this reverse — nay, smile at it; and because of it I shall overcome all that are opposing me in the struggle for the right."

"John, it was dark night to me, — life meant nothing, was nothing, — until I found you, dear," murmured Vivian in his ear. "The years I have lived seem as bare as the trees in winter. Now that love has come, John, those 'bare, ruined choirs' are flooded with green light, and the birds sing."

"I have everything to thank you for, dearest," he said. "From the first moment when it came to me, your love has strengthened my spirit, nerved my courage, inspired me in every thought and act, — my sweet one, my rose, my wood-violet!"

"Is n't it wonderful?" she said. "With me it has been growing, this beautiful thing, only half recognized at first, and then becoming larger, greater, stronger,

wider, until it has replaced everything else. They talk in the Bible of the kind of love that makes one willing to leave father and mother, surrender wealth and vanities, and give all, everything, to follow where that love leads, — and I could never understand it; but now I know that there is n't any sacrifice where one loves; one follows, merely, eagerly follows, where love leads, for it can't take one astray; the path is all strewn with flowers."

"But there shall be no sacrifice, even worldly sacrifice," asserted Price, now full of pluck and courage once more. "I shall ask you to share in no broken fortunes. I am going to succeed, dear, practically, and in a business way. I don't merely believe, abstractly, in the establishment of truth and justice; I know that these are at the bottom of all business success, that they can be made to pay, pay good big dividends, in hard cash. I doubled the value of the 'News' on that very basis, within a few months, and believe me, I shall not stop or be stopped there."

"One cannot always win, John," interposed the business man's daughter, half doubtingly, perhaps; "but a man is just as great, greater even, if he loses, and it really makes but little difference to me, to our love, now."

"Yes, in a sense, it makes little difference, in another, much," mused Price, half to himself, and half carrying on her thought to its logical conclusion. "If I cannot

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make the business men of this community, your father among the rest; appreciate the practical value of the principle for which I am contending, it will be a serious misfortune to us all. Do you understand what I mean, dear?"

"The theory, yes; what is the immediate practical application?" she asked.

"Can't you see, Vivian, what ultimate folly it is for the wealthy men of a city, incorporated into a great public service company, to buy rights and franchises, belonging to themselves as part of the body politic, from a gang of politicians, to whom they do not belong, and who will mulct them perpetually? How can they go on making the criminal error of filching from the municipality its most valuable treasures? The bankruptcy of a city means the ultimate ruin of its citizens. That is the self-evident truth I am trying to hammer into the heads of people, and that is why they have pitched me out of my paper. They want to shut their ears to the truth, to hide it from sight, but they cannot and they shall not."

"I am not sure that I wholly understand, even yet," said the girl, with puckered brow, "and yet it is important, essential, that I should. They say you are a socialist, and if you are, it must be right, and I ought to be a socialist, too, only I don't exactly know how," and her eyes sparkled merrily.

"Red cap and all?" he queried, with a grave smile.

"Red cap, Salvation Army bonnet, anything, John, only please let it be becoming!"

"No," he continued, earnestly, "don't worry about my socialism. I'm intensely individual, in my theory of things. It is units and not conglomerates that sway the world and guide its destinies. Municipal control and operation of public utilities is the first step towards paternalism, the first symptom of the decay of pure democracy. But that does not mean that the property of the city is therefore open to general plunder to the first hand strong enough to seize upon it and hold it. The city should claim its own; but it should give full and free opportunity for the development of private capital and individual enterprise. The moment we step beyond the province of safe investment of the public wealth and enter upon that of speculation and business enterprise, the public corporation should give place to the private corporation."

"I think I understand your theory," said Vivian, who had listened intently, for it meant everything to her that Price and her father should be reconciled. "I am sure your position is not generally understood."

"I have tried hard enough to make it clear," said Price, with a tinge of bitterness, "but the whole community is so imbued with the notion that the city should give away

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millions to a favored few, and that any other course is rank socialism; men won't listen to reason. They do not wish to listen, that is all there is to it; but they shall, Vivian, and I will make them hear."

"I am sure of it," she applauded.

"The fact of the matter is," continued Price, "this sort of thing has got to stop, right here and now. The wealthy men of a community cannot long continue to plunder that community without results alike fatal to themselves and every other citizen. That is the indubitable fact I am going to keep hammering on until I drive it into people's heads somehow. The only kind of wealth that does n't take unto itself wings and fly away over night is founded upon honor and truth, and an abiding respect for the commandment: 'Thou shalt not steal!' Our ancestors, who founded the colonies and upbuilt the republic were neither socialists nor impractical idealists. The old Yankee traders accumulated solid fortunes by a shrewdness and commercial enterprise that became proverbial."

"And just what is your position in this particular instance? What do you propose in regard to the franchise?" asked Vivian. "For I must talk to father, since he will not talk to you, or try to appreciate or understand you."

"Simply this: I contend that Carthage should lease her franchise privileges to her private capitalists at a

fair valuation. That the lease should pay interest on that valuation of at least three per cent. That is investment. The private enterprise of the city, through energy and thrift, may still reap rich returns, or suffer loss through neglect and incompetence. That is their concern. The city's investment is safe, its property unimpaired and gradually increasing in value."

"I am afraid my father would never see it in that light," said Vivian, shaking her head. "I have heard him talk more or less as you do, often, and then conclude by saying it is fine in theory, but won't work out in practice."

"Then I shall have to teach them all a lesson," declared Price, setting his jaw. "Neither business man nor politician shall plunder this town of her richest patrimony while I have breath to protest against it. The time will come, Vivian, when your father will listen to reason. Until then we must wait and hope."

"So we will, dear," she rejoined, looking up at him with fond pride. "But in the meantime, while the struggle is progressing, you must be on your guard, John. If anything should happen to you through them, your enemies, I mean, it would kill me. You must be careful, very careful. You are so strong, both physically and morally, that you may underestimate the cunning and power of your adversaries. I fear, dear heart, that they

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have not, even yet, done their worst against you. I have heard vague threats about the political meeting to-night that filled me with alarm. They are going to use the police against you and try to prevent you from speaking; for my sake, if for no other, go well guarded this evening and keep surrounded by your friends and supporters. Promise me faithfully that you will be watchful and take care of yourself."

"Never fear," said Price. "I am within the law, and neither the police, nor any one else, can interfere with me nor prevent me from speaking,—thank you, all the same, for the warning, dearest."

"They are planning something, I know."

"Don't worry. They dare not face me in the open, not one of them."

"I believe it," she applauded, her undefined fears subsiding before his strong confidence. "But we must walk on, now,—how we will both cherish the memory of our talk by the fountain!"

That fountain, the fountain of love and communion with the beloved, its waters flow everywhere, can we but find them; bare indeed is the memory that does not cherish some such tenderness.

Price looked at his watch and arose with a sigh. "Yes, we must hurry on, it's later than I thought," he acknowledged regretfully.

Ten minutes later they parted at the gate of the Everett residence and Price bade her "good night," and whispered "God bless you, dear," under his breath as the gate closed behind her. Then he turned and hurried on his way towards the Seventeenth Ward mass meeting. Had he dallied much longer he would have been beguiled into being late for his appointment.

CHAPTER XVIII

VAGUE ALARMS

VIVIAN arrived in time for dinner, where she forced herself to enter into the general conversation and managed to conceal her agitation by talking glib common-places with more than her usual vivacity. Her father was in a stern and gloomy humor, something rare for him, and scarcely smiled at her most captivating sallies. She was endeavoring to exert her feminine wiles upon him in a way that would have amused Mr. Archibald Dean intensely had he been privileged to stand behind the scenes and watch the byplay. Vivian wished to cajole her father into a mood which would enable her to talk with him upon the subject nearest her heart that very evening, but Everett was not just then engaged in transactions of a sort that made him wish for a *tête-à-tête* with his lovely daughter, though he had no inkling how deeply she was concerned in their outcome.

Naturally preferring fair play and honorable courses, he had found himself drawn deeper and deeper into the mire of questionable intrigue by what he regarded as the

exigencies of the occasion; but he was averse to a confidential chat with Vivian under such circumstances, — his finer instincts revolted at it.

When they arose from the table Vivian resolved to waste no more time in indirection, but to face it out with him, whether he were in the humor or no. She was determined, then and there, to demand an explanation of the dark threats against her lover, which she had chanced to overhear.

"I want to see you, father," she said; "I must talk with you alone, at once."

Everett looked at her quickly and saw that something of consequence was in the wind. "Not now, Vivian, not this evening," he said impatiently, as the butler helped him with his overcoat.

She put her hand on his sleeve, with gentle importunity. "Please, father," she pleaded, with an appealing look.

But it was just that look Everett could not, would not meet. "To-morrow, Vivy, to-morrow," he muttered, shaking off her hand almost roughly. "I'm busy to-night, very busy, and am already late for my appointment." So saying, he hurried from the house, leaving his daughter a prey to vague alarms. All the doubts and misgivings concerning the state of her own affections had been set at rest forever. In that one moment of self-forgetfulness

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she had given herself, heart and soul, into her lover's keeping. Henceforth her doubts and fears were for him, not herself. And yet it had all come about so naturally that it seemed already quite a matter of course, and she could scarcely realize that anything unusual had happened.

In spite of the difficulties and dangers that beset them both, she was supremely happy, and yet, withal, fearful, for it seemed almost too grand and beautiful to be real and lasting. It was this that served to increase her sense of approaching misfortune, which she seemed to feel, intuitively, that she must do something to avert. Mischief was brewing, of that she was all the more positive on account of her father's unusually brusque manner, and she vainly strove to devise some means whereby she could discover what was in the wind and interfere effectually in her lover's behalf. Never before had she been given occasion to regret the limitations of her sex, though Archie Dean would have informed her, sagely, that a man, under such conditions, would be blissfully oblivious, lacking her sixth sense, but Vivian had lost faith in the philosophy of Mr. Archibald Dean.

Feeling that she must talk the situation over with some one, the girl finally took Electa into her confidence, though expecting small aid or comfort from one so young and inexperienced as her little guest. But Electa list-

ened to the story of her *fiancé's* conduct toward her cousin with intense indignation.

"What's to be done; what can be done?" cried Vivian, in helpless anxiety.

"In the first place I am going to send for Mr. Dean and make him undo the wrong, or all is at an end between us," said Electa tragically.

In vain did Vivian try to find excuses for Archie, whom she had abused so roundly herself, for she had not quite yet lost the idea that this was her exclusive privilege, and she did her best to present the absentee's point of view as she understood it.

"It is all plausible enough," admitted Electa, "but how did he dare decide a question of such vital importance to us both without consulting me?"

"I don't suppose he thought you had anything to do with it," urged Vivian; for she feared the result of such a difference between Electa and her *fiancé*.

"Not when my cousin's whole career and my future husband's honor were involved? It is useless to argue the point, Vivian, I must see Archie immediately." And with that Electa went to the telephone and rang up Dean's clubs one after another, then his rooms, then his office, then his more intimate friends; but she could learn nothing as to his whereabouts.

Vivian sat by while Electa scoured the telephone book

and kept "Central" extremely busy, until she could stand the nervous tension caused by these futile efforts no longer.

"I am going out, Electa," she said, at last, "so you can have Mr. Dean to yourself. I hope you will be able to make him see things from our point of view, for, when all is said and done, I must confess that he is just as wrong-headed as all the rest in this wretched business."

"All right, Vivy," said Electa, absently, as she went on with her persistent efforts upon the telephone. Nor did she rest content when these failed, but kept messenger boys running all over the city throughout the evening in the vain effort to locate and bring to time her recreant lover.

"He's ashamed of himself and does n't dare face me," was the thought that continually spurred her on to renewed effort.

Vivian's mother had gone out to a reception. Mrs. Everett was more devoted to society than to either husband or daughter. It was this fact, perhaps, that palliated some of the heedlessness Vivian was at first disposed to display towards Price until the woman in her was touched and quickened by his love. At any rate, it was not to her own mother she turned in the hour of her distress, but to the mother of John Price.

It was n't a conventional thing to do, but at such a

time she was n't going to sit still and wring her hands if there were hope of accomplishing anything.

Electa might and might not be able to exert some influence over Archie Dean, where she had failed utterly, but Vivian did n't have much confidence in that young gentleman's powers in the present emergency, — wherein she scarcely did him justice, as the event proved.

At any rate, she could n't stay at home, so she ordered the carriage and drove to the Prices' house. Mrs. Price greeted her with some astonishment, reading the girl's vague terror in her face, and asked her what was the matter.

"Mr. Price is n't at home, I hope, — that is, I did n't suppose he would be," faltered Vivian, beginning to appreciate that her coming in this fashion might be open to serious misconstruction.

"Oh no; he is very busy these days," replied Mrs. Price. "He is to speak at a political meeting this evening, but I expect him home in about an hour. I wanted to go with him, but he said that it might turn out to be a rather rough and tumble affair, so he would n't let me."

"That was just what I wanted to see you about," said Vivian, her alarm reviving at the suggestion that there was going to be anything "rough and tumble" at the meeting. "I have some reason to fear for his safety, and I wanted to see if there was any way of protecting him."

"John is usually able to take care of himself," said the mother, rather proudly, for her boy had knocked about the city as a reporter for many years, and come out unscathed from many a dangerous venture. "But I am sorry he is making so many powerful enemies," she added. "He is so strong and self-confident; he does not appreciate how really alone he stands, how isolated and exposed to attack."

"I know it," assented Vivian. "I warned him that they are plotting against him, but he would not listen, and yet they have done enough already to put any man on his guard."

"You warned him!" exclaimed Mrs. Price, in puzzled astonishment. She was aware, of course, of her son's love for Vivian, but was ignorant of the more recent developments of their romance, and began to be affected by the young girl's evident concern for John's safety.

"Yes, warned him as definitely as I well could," replied Vivian, desperately; "but I now wish I had been even more explicit. I must confide in some one, and so, — have come to you."

"I am glad you did," said the elder woman, as she took the girl's hand in hers; how glad, how touched she was might have been guessed from the tender shine in her eyes.

So Vivian told the whole story from the first days at

Narragansett to the scene without Dean's office, and as she did so the bright golden head and the silver gray one came very close together.

It was evident from the first that there was going to be no such small jealousy or unhappy bickering as too frequently comes between the husband's wife and his mother. If she accomplished nothing else by her rash excursion, Vivian found her way to his mother's heart.

"You remind me of your grandmother, dear," said Mrs. Price, as she studied the young girl's face thoughtfully.

"My grandmother?" queried Vivian, somewhat perplexed.

"Your grandmother Everett," explained Mrs. Price. "I knew her when I was a young girl in Medfield. She taught our Sunday school class, and I used to drive over to see her when she was no longer able to come to church. She was a delightful old lady, and had your features, dear."

"You came from Medfield, too; you knew father there?"

"Yes; he was the best and most devoted of sons," said the elder woman, "and was even then beginning to show the ability which made his success in after-life."

"But I don't understand, — surely father would remember you?" That was as pointedly as she thought

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it delicate to ask what had been Mrs. Price's maiden name, resolving to wait until she could ask John about it before speaking to her father of the early acquaintance.

But Mrs. Price was reticent. "Most likely," she said, with a grave smile, and then changed the subject by saying that she did not like the hints dropped by Evans any better than Vivian did.

"He has always been my son's friend, until recently," she said, "and, though they have now quarrelled all the more bitterly, for that very reason, I know that John has always had a higher opinion of Mr. Evans, and greater toleration for his confessedly evil influence, than I myself could ever wholly understand. I think we need not fear any personal violence, however."

"But can't we do something?" urged Vivian, desperately.

"My dear, it is a woman's part to watch and wait," said Mrs. Price, with a patient smile.

"That is the way they used to do; but we are more strenuous now, I suppose," retorted Vivian, almost gayly. It was such a comfort to confide in some one who also loved John Price, that she found her fears gradually dissipated under the elder woman's gentle influence, and hurried to her own home as the hour approached when Price was expected to return to his, to find Electa almost in a fever of worriment over Archie Dean, who was nowhere to be found, in spite of all her efforts.

"Suppose they both went to the caucus and were assassinated!" cried Electa, all her rage against Dean having given place to extreme anxiety.

"Perhaps that is he now," suggested Vivian, as the telephone bell rang. But it was Mrs. Price, anxiously inquiring if Vivian had heard anything of John, who had not returned home, though the political meeting had been over for some time. This, of course, only served to increase the worriment of the two girls.

Then Mr. and Mrs. Everett returned from the reception where the business man had joined his wife; but though he seemed pale and agitated, he protested that he knew nothing concerning either Dean or the editor, and hurried to his room. As, with all their efforts, nothing could be learned, the two girls finally retired.

Until morning dawned, Vivian Everett did not close her eyes, and in those weary hours she thought more deeply, more seriously, than ever before in her whole life. Girlhood vanished, and womanhood blossomed in those silent hours.

She had played at love so often and so long, and now she realized that she had never known anything about it, save its name. Her whole previous life seemed to her self-centred and selfish. She had n't done very much harm, to be sure, or very much good, either; in fact, it seemed to her as though she had not really lived at all.

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It was this sense of newly awakened interests, newly aroused perceptions of beauty, freshly adjusted appreciation of the true proportion of things, that made her seem to view life from higher levels and perceive wider horizons.

When love first blossoms, when womanhood first blooms, there is a sweet, soul-fragrance exhaled, in the lone watches of the night.

John Price had won a pearl of inestimable treasure, a night-blooming cereus of rarest beauty.

CHAPTER XIX

FOUL PLAY

THOMAS EVANS met his subordinates, Fagan and Driscoll, in the back room of the Sphynx saloon, to compare notes over the chances of success at the Seventeenth Ward caucus that evening. The reports were all reassuring. Price had a very strong minority in the ward itself, but arrangements had been made to vote over a thousand outsiders, which seemed doubly to assure machine victory.

"The only danger lies in the mass meeting," said Driscoll, "but there is little to be feared from such a disorganized rabble."

"Much, with a leader like Price," asserted Evans; "we cannot afford to take any chances, gentlemen."

"If you will have our good friend, Inspector Burnham, on hand, with a squad of twenty men, with instructions to arrest all disturbers of the peace and detain all onlookers as witnesses, we will have some of the boys meet Price just before he arrives at the meeting and pick a quarrel." Such was Fagan's elaboration of Evans's original idea, and the scheme seemed to meet the emergency nicely.

"I'll attend to my part of it; Burnham shall be on hand," promised Evans. "But be careful that your men don't go too far; I won't have one hair of that young man's head injured."

"Don't be afraid," promised Driscoll, "we could n't afford to do anything like that."

"Of course not," chimed in Fagan, "though I admit that I would like to give him a black eye myself, — he slings a nasty pen."

"Never mind that; no violence, remember. All the fraud you please in this business, but no violence," commanded Evans, as he left his associates, to seek out the chief of police. Inspector Burnham owed his position to Evans, and could refuse him nothing in reason. The task assigned him was simple. He was to have several officers arrive at a certain street corner, at a certain hour; they would there find Editor Price and several others engaged in angry altercation and fisticuffs. All hands were to be placed under arrest and the patrol wagon summoned. It would be in waiting a short distance up the street. When the party arrived at the police station, Price was to be released with profuse apologies; but he would n't have a chance to speak at the caucus; that was all that was wanted of Burnham.

He carried out his instructions to the letter; but, when the party of brawlers his men had arrested were brought

before him, he was astonished and chagrined not to find the editor among them.

"What does this mean?" he whispered in dismay to Lieutenant Finnerty.

"There was two or three fights goin' on, sir, and I took the bunch nearest the corner."

"But where was Editor Price?"

"I was n't paying no attention, sir," pleaded the lieutenant. "You said, sir, the party as would be rioting at the corner of Blake and Winter streets, them was my instructions; I was n't to break up no other row but that there one."

"You fool, it was n't the corner of the street you were to lay your hands on; it was the editor."

"At the corner of Blake and Winter," persisted Finnerty; "you said that yourself, the corner of Blake and Winter; I'll leave it to Al Connors if that was n't the corner you said."

"Damn the corner, you know what you were sent for."

"But he was n't where I was sent, and I was n't sent nowhere else; I'll leave it to Al Connors," muttered Finnerty.

"Shut up," roared his superior officer, wondering how he could square himself with Evans. He had wished to avoid being personally involved in the matter, and had been foiled by the stupidity, or well-concealed cunning, of

his subordinate, — he could n't quite make out which; but it made small difference in the final result.

Meanwhile Fagan and Driscoll had apparently managed better, — at least they did not mince matters, but made their wants and wishes known to fitting instruments, of their malevolent purpose. They collected a gang of thugs at the Sphinx (this was Fagan's particular part of the program) and he had the very men required among his workers, political brawlers who had done him many a brutal service in his long career on the seamy side of Carthage politics. The leader of Fagan's motley crew was a prize fighter dubbed by the devotees of the ring "The Red Spider," a huge creature with brawny arms, covered with red hair, and a face that usually bristled with fiery stubble.

"A dangerous beast," whispered Driscoll, doubtfully, as the bruiser entered.

"Gentle as a lamb," assured Fagan, "though a bit of a devil when he's in liquor," whereupon the "Alderman from the First" ordered the drinks, and proceeded to inflame his chosen emissaries with "fire water" and enmity for John Price. Neither task proved very difficult, for the editor was no friend of the manly art of self-defence, as practised in the Carthage dives, one of the worst of which was conducted by the "Red Spider" himself, and Price had several times called the attention of the police to the sort of "joint" he conducted. In short, the bruiser had a griev-

ance of his own, and was only too willing to undertake the adventure under promise of immunity from the consequences, given by his good friend and political superior, Patrick Fagan.

"Of course," warned Driscoll, "you fellows understand that there must be no violence."

"Oh, we will be as gentle wid him as his own mother, when she puts him to sleep," assured the "Red Spider" with an ugly leer.

"That 's right, that 's the idea," approved Driscoll, and the politicians left the prize fighter and his gang to their own devices, turning them loose to do what they would, so long as John Price was prevented from addressing the mass meeting at the Seventeenth Ward caucus. Driscoll did n't like the bruiser's looks, but he assured himself that the police would be on hand to prevent any serious mischief, in any event.

Archie Dean had sat in his office in the same attitude in which Vivian had left him, for fully half an hour, a prey to no very pleasant reflections. The reproaches which had been heaped upon him by Miss Everett rankled in his soul, and the scorn of John Price, no less evident because suppressed, crushed his spirit; for he admired the editor sincerely, was drawn to the man in spite of himself and the financial interests with which he was allied so closely.


Dean felt injured and abused, at odds with himself and

every one else. The brunt of all the disagreeable, dirty business had fallen upon him, and he felt that he had been placed in a position altogether false and unworthy, without any serious fault or wrong-doing on his part. It all seemed distinctly unfair.

"How can I ever look Electa in the face again?" he sighed. At last he made an effort to pull himself together; and, taking out his watch, found that it was long past his usual dinner hour; but he had lost his appetite and resolved to proceed at once to the Seventeenth Ward caucus. "I have no stomach left for eating and drinking; but there is going to be a jolly row," he muttered, "and it may shake me out of myself to be on hand to see it. Jack Price will be in the thick of it; and if he talks to the mass meeting as he did to me, he will stir the crowd up to a riot before he is done with them. He is in a dangerous mood and will make the fur fly."

So Archie Dean closed his office and walked rapidly in the direction of Blackbush Square, where the Seventeenth Ward meeting was to be held.

On leaving Vivian, John Price had preceded Dean in the same direction. His thoughts were in such a tumult that it was extremely difficult for him to collect them, and concentrate his ideas on the speech he was to deliver. An hour before, fired by the sense of injury and outrage, he could, without preparation, have poured forth a torrent



of fierce, angry words, well-calculated for the purpose he had in view, — which was to make every hearer a voter in his interest at the caucus. This was to be held in a building on one of the corners of the square; and this method of fighting the enemy with their own weapons and packing a packed caucus, though novel, he felt assured was not only justified, but very likely to be successful.

But now, all his anger was gone, and even the sense of injury which remained was so softened by the memory of Vivian's tender caresses and sweet, whispered words of love, that he vainly tried to arouse himself to that pitch of anger and resentment almost essential to the occasion.

He was still some distance from Blackbush Square, and was just approaching the corner of Blake Street, when he came to a spot where there happened to be no electric lights, and where vacant lots fronted on either side of the street. It was one of those smoky fall nights, when everything seems hazy and indistinct, the very trees along the road-side seeming a row of giant sentinels.

As he was making his way along dubiously, a rough looking fellow, who seemed half intoxicated, stumbled against him in the darkness.

"Look out, my friend," called Price, "look out; I'm in a hurry."

"In a hurry, are yer?" retorted the fellow, insolently; "better wait until yer hurry's over."

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"Come, come, get out of the way!" said the editor, impatiently.

"All right, mister, I just wanted to ask you a question; don't get so huffy."

"Stand aside, please; I've no time to talk with you," commanded Price.

But now another man, a big, burly fellow, whom Price at once recognized as the noted bruiser and dive keeper, the "Red Spider," stepped up to him from somewhere out of the darkness and stood directly in his pathway.

"See here, young feller," said the newcomer, "don't you go to fussing wid my friend here; can't you see he's drunk, boss?"

"All I want is to proceed; let me pass, please, I'm in a hurry," said Price, with what patience he could muster.

"Now, don't yer get gay wid me. What's yer fighting weight?" queried the pugilist, doubling up his fists and evidently determined to pick a quarrel.

The editor squared himself and fixed his eye on the fellow. "My fighting weight is just one hundred and eighty-five pounds," said he. John Price was too ready for an encounter of any sort, — a fact upon which his enemies had cunningly relied.

The bully slunk back, with the look of a sneak; and Price started to proceed on his way, when he felt the shock of a blow from behind. It came from some soft, heavy

thing, which Price always believed to have been a sand bag, a favorite weapon with the thugs of Carthage. It made him stagger forward, but did not hurt him.

At last, awakening to a sense of personal danger, Price made a sudden rush forward to meet the two men who stood in his way. He struck the bruiser fairly between the eyes, with a quick, short, shoulder jab that sent the fellow, with all his burly bulk, sprawling against a tree. The other opponent, who was probably not so drunk as he seemed, dodged Price's left-hander, which came viciously enough his way, by falling to the ground and claspings the editor about the legs.

As Price was struggling desperately to free his feet from the man's grasp and make good his escape, he received a second blow from the sand bag, this time over the back of the head, a blow which made him reel and stagger and see "stars," vivid lightning flashes that quivered before his eyes. Some one pinned his arms to his sides. He freed them with a vigorous jerk and struck blindly, desperately. Another blow from the sand bag, this time sheltered from his body by his uplifted elbow. Again Price struck out in the dark, in the fast-gathering dark, more feebly this time.

Then it came, a terrible sweep, fetching him at the back of the head, near the base of the brain. He stumbled, staggered, reeled, fell. Up to now he had fought silently,

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as men of courage love to fight, when they must fight at all, but as he fell he called loudly for help. It was a fight no longer. It was murder. It had been four, five, six, he could not tell how many, to one; and the struggle was over. A foot was planted on his face, tearing the flesh with an ugly, hob-nailed heel. Another foot was stamped upon his stomach. "Is this the end?" thought Price, and struggled no longer.

Suddenly, although he was barely conscious of it, he seemed to hear a loud cry, the hurry of rapid feet, half a dozen sharp, "thwack, thwack, thwacks;" then there were sounds as of several men scampering and scurrying away, as if for dear life. The heel was gone from his torn and bleeding face. The weight which had been pressing the life out of his body was gone too. Some one was bending over him.

"Who are you, man?" queried a voice, that seemed to come to him from a great distance, though he knew it was right in his ear. "What villany is this? Speak; why don't you speak?"

But Price could not speak, he could only groan; and to his deadened ears his own moan sounded like the gurgle of the dying.

"The poor fellow has been mauled out of all human semblance, I fear," muttered Archie Dean. "Where in thunder is my match-safe. I must have a light."



The match flickered, and threw a tremulous, ruddy glare upon the face on the ground, the torn and bleeding face, which seemed ghastly in the dark haze.

"My God! It's Jack Price!" exclaimed Archie Dean, shocked beyond all expression. "The devils, the dirty, mean, cruel curs. It is not enough that he must be sold out by his friends, he must be pounded to death by cut-throats, too. Damn their railroad. I wash my hands of them, the whole beastly crew." Soliloquizing thus profanely, Dean was striving to wipe the blood from John's face, and to staunch its flow as best he could. "Can't you speak to me, old man? Where have they hurt you? Whisper, if you cannot speak; are you shot?"

"No," Price managed to whisper, faintly; "sand-bagged, that's all."

"Hi, there, boy!" called Dean, catching sight, suddenly, of an urchin across the street.

"Yeth, thir?"

"It will be worth a dollar to you to have a carriage here in five minutes, and ten dollars to the man that drives it. Where is it, old man?" he whispered, as Price groaned again.

"All over, I think," returned the editor faintly. "I feel like a big bunch of jelly."

"Shall I try to lift you up?"

"No, no, not yet; it—it hurts too much," and Price fainted.

Dean opened the editor's coat and loosened his shirt at the throat, so that he might breathe more freely. The fresh air against his chest revived him. "I think the blow at the back of my head did as much mischief as anything, don't, — don't touch it; I can't bear it," said he.

Presently the carriage drove up, and Archie, with an immense sense of relief, with the assistance of the driver, lifted Price, writhing and groaning, and placed him upon the seat.

"We must take him home at once," cried Dean.

"No, no; not there," said Price. "Not there under any circumstances, — my mother, you know."

"Well, then, quick! to the Carthage General Hospital."

"No, no, the caucus, Archie, the caucus; for the love of God, tell him to drive me to Blackbush Square; it's only just around the corner."

"Are you crazy, man? Your wounds need dressing immediately. For all we know, your skull may be fractured; ten minutes' delay may be fatal."

Price collected himself for a supreme effort, and then said, slowly, distinctly: "Archie Dean, I am in your hands; don't fail me again. Stand by me for half an hour for the sake of — of Vivian! The caucus, man; can't you see why I have been beaten almost to death? But I'll win out yet, please God; the caucus, Archie, the caucus!"

CHAPTER XX

DUMB MOUTHS

ARCHIE DEAN hesitated. It was a grave responsibility. Price was in a condition where immediate medical attention might save his life, and neglect and excitement might, on the other hand, prove fatal; but the editor would gladly give his life for one last chance to strike a blow in the cause he had so earnestly espoused, and had appealed to Dean to repair, in some measure, the wrong he had done him. It was this appeal that turned the scale, for Archie was burning with desire to retrieve himself in his own and his friend's estimation.

At first he had feared that the Carthage Electric directors, and perhaps Everett himself, had been directly responsible for the outrage; but he now saw that it had a political purpose behind it, and caught a glimpse of the truth. "He is right; the cause he fights for is dearer than life itself to this man," thought Dean, "and I must act for him, as he would act for himself, and take all chances in his behalf; he will beat them yet, the blackguards," and he turned to the driver, crying: "Drive to Blackbush Square, as fast as you can, — alive or dead," he muttered to him-

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self, "Jack Price shall keep his appointment to address the mass meeting at Blackbush Square!"

The caucus was to last from seven to ten, and hours before the opening, a long line of street cleaners and other laborers from every part of the city, street-car employees, ward-heelers of every description and complexion were in line, every one with a ballot in his hand bearing the name of the organization candidate. At seven o'clock several large brewery wagons, with a force of brewing company employees, drove up to the polls, — then came another line of carryalls from the Carthage brickyards, at the other end of the city. The machine was out to win.

Meanwhile, a throng of another sort had begun to collect about a platform in the centre of Blackbush Square. At first it was composed mostly of citizens of the ward, workingmen, to be sure; but workingmen who owned their little homes and paid city taxes on them. The mass meeting at the square was called for a quarter of seven; but the hour of seven had arrived and no one had undertaken the task of calling the meeting to order. Several officers in uniform had begun to circulate among the crowd, politely requesting the men to "move on." In this part of the evening's program Inspector Burnham was keenly alive to his duty and made no mistake.

As there was no organization, no cohesion, merely a crowd, a mob, and an orderly mob at that, men slowly



drew away from the centre of the square. It began to look as though the much-advertised mass meeting was going to be a "fizzle" after all.

Just then, however, the Carpenters' and Joiners' Union, one hundred strong, marched upon the square, headed by a fife and drum corps. It lined up in front of the platform where it formed the nucleus for a quickly gathering assemblage. A lieutenant of police promptly stepped up to the leader of the carpenters and said: "Beg pardon, Mr. Andrews, but have you permission to parade?"

"Certainly, lieutenant; we know who controls the police force, and we came prepared. The Trades Assembly delegates waited upon the mayor this afternoon, and His Honor signed this permit at their request. Here it is; I think you will find it regular."

Another fife and drum corps was heard at the other end of the square, tooting "Yankee Doodle" vociferously. The Bricklayers', Plasterers' and Stone Masons' Union was in line, one hundred and fifty strong, and debouched upon the square, preceded by a transparency bearing the inscription: "No franchise for the Carthage Electric."

A vast throng had now collected. The square was black with people; but the machine was meanwhile piling up votes at the caucus. Andrews, who had waited several minutes for the arrival of Price, felt that no more time was to be lost. A squad of police was working desperately to

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break up the meeting; and unless something were done, and done quickly, the assemblage must be dispersed, or there would be a riot; and, in either event, the purpose of the meeting would be defeated. Determined to do his best to save the day he sprang to the platform. He was plainly dressed, a black flannel shirt rolled away from a fine throat, giving full play to the sweep of a heavy red beard.

"My friends," he cried, "this is a great day for the city of Carthage."

"Hurray, hurray, hurray!" bellowed the crowd.

"It was expected," continued Andrews, "that another, abler than myself and a more accustomed speaker, would be here by this time to address you."

"Price, Price, we want Price!" yelled the crowd.

"But, if you will have patience for a few minutes, he will soon be here."

Andrews could proceed no farther. There was a confused roar of sound, and a mounted officer, backed by a score of police, forced their way through the throng, and pushed up to the platform.

"Gentlemen," cried the officer, "I regret to say, but my instructions are positive, that this meeting, held as it is in the vicinity of a caucus, is illegal, and that it is my duty to disperse you."

"Officer," said Andrews, "we have a full license from the mayor."

"The mayor had no right or power to grant it, and would not have done so had he known how the privilege was to be abused. This meeting is illegal, so the city attorney has advised, and must be dispersed."

"Captain Callahan," bawled Andrews, "this is an outrage, and one that will cost you your place. Come here, before it is too late. I must have a talk with you."

Callahan hesitated; but the influence of the trades unions was strong in Carthage politics, and the threat had struck home. He dismounted and stepped with Andrews to a corner of the platform.

Meanwhile there had been suppressed hisses from the crowd; and, at this sign of weakening, on the part of the captain of police, it broke into wild disorder. "Disperse the police!" shouted one voice. "Ter Hell wid der perlice!" called another; "Red head, red head!" called a third, in derision of a burly Hibernian of the force. Pandemonium had begun to reign, a riot was imminent, and a riot was what the police were playing for. It would afford the pretext wanted for making arrests and breaking up the meeting with a strong hand.

Just then a carriage drove in among the throng, at the further end of the square. The crowd quickly gathered about it in a seething mass of humanity. Shouts of "Price! Price!" were heard on all sides. The men in the labor union companies broke ranks, and were soon lost in

the immense concourse of people, which now filled all the northern end of the square. The platform, Andrews, the captain, and the squad of police were suddenly placed at the outskirts of the assemblage, instead of in the centre of it.

Captain Callahan, believing that he had been duped dexterously, muttered an oath, broke off his conference with Andrews abruptly, and, followed by his squad, endeavored again to force his way to the centre of the throng. But, by this time, it was no easy matter. People were packed together like sardines, and could not move if they would. There was a vast deal of pushing, hauling, and jostling, but the captain did not venture to order his men to use their clubs, and but little headway was made.

Price had remained silent during the short drive, drawing his breath in quick, short gasps, but evidently collecting his strength for one supreme effort. As the carriage reached the square, Price tried to drag himself to his feet, presenting his pale and blood-stained face to the thousand-eyed mob before him, — an apparition ghastly indeed, and calculated, in itself alone, to arouse the passions of men.

There were cheers and cries of: "He's hurt! they've killed Price! let's have revenge! who did it?" and the like.

Price waved his hand feebly, and Dean bawled: "Si-

lence," at the top of his lungs. Price made another effort to rise and speak, and then fell back limply into his friend's arms. "I can't do it," he murmured. "Flesh and blood can't endure the torture. Archie, be the man I once thought you. Stand by me now, for God's sake. Tell them about it. Speak for me. I thought I could pull myself together for it, but I'm played out, clean gone!"

Archie Dean had never been as near a caucus as he was now in all his life. His law practice consisted chiefly in taking care of his uncle's property and that of the other members of his set. He was n't a trial lawyer and had seldom addressed a jury. To the real passions that swayed the common men of his day and generation he was almost a stranger. He shrank from the task of addressing that rough and uncultured assemblage. But he was better qualified for the task than he imagined, and possessed latent powers in grace of speech and command of language, of which he himself was unaware. The occasion sometimes makes the man, and it was characteristic of Archibald Dean to take obligations of others, of whatever name or nature, upon his own shoulders, and meet them as best he could, regardless of consequences. One look at the appealing, scarred, bloody face of his friend was enough to nerve his courage and overcome all his natural aversion.

Laying Price gently down upon the seat of the carriage, he mounted the driver's box and faced the crowd,

wondering what words he would find to say. "Gentlemen," he began.

"Louder, louder," warned a hundred voices, in strident tones.

"I wish I had a pair of bellows instead of a voice," he bawled in response. There was a general laugh, which, as it arose from the agitation of a thousand diaphragms, sounded like waves on the sea beach. That put Archie at his ease, as he looked over the sea of faces; and, though his knees were trembling under him, he was suddenly caught in the whirl of the moment. He had never before felt the thrilling inspiration of a vast audience, which seemed, for the instant, as countless as the drifting souls in Dante's "Purgatory." He seemed lifted, for the time being, out of himself.

"Citizens of Carthage," he cried, remembering the burning words of his friend, that afternoon, "men who pay her taxes and live in her homes, I call upon you to avenge, in the best way it can be avenged, an outrage which has been perpetrated upon the liberties of all of us, an outrage upon the privileges of citizenship, the liberty of free speech, the very institution of self-government itself, which all of us, — all of us, rich and poor alike, hold dear.

"I do not know who is directly responsible for this great wrong; but here, in this carriage, right before our eyes, lies the maimed and bleeding body of my poor friend, my

dear friend, John Price. While on his way to this meeting, he was set upon by a lot of dirty dogs and beaten until the flesh hangs loose upon his bones. Do you hear? In order that he might not appear before you and stir you by his words, in order that a rival candidate might represent this ward, might misrepresent this ward and the city of Carthage, this thing has been done. Shall this infamous plot succeed, citizens of Carthage? No, a thousand times, no. For the honor of American liberty, for the rights of American manhood, for the institutions our fathers fought for and we were born to cherish, see to it, gentlemen, see to it, that yonder line of hired cattle, voting ballots that they cannot read, is swept aside; and that John Price is returned as your candidate from this ward."

There was a deafening uproar following Dean's words; and there were wild cheers, mingled with cries of "Shame" as he sat down.

"Here, Archie, here," said Price, touching his pocket, feebly. Archie felt in the place indicated and found a package. He opened it and understood at once. They were ballots, printed at the "News" office that afternoon. He arose again and scattered the papers broadcast, among the crowd, where they were quickly passed from hand to hand. "Now," he shouted, at the top of his lungs, "hur-ray! To the caucus! to the caucus!"

Each slip of paper bore the inscription: "For Alderman,

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John Price." Two thousand and more of them were rapidly circulated among Dean's auditors. Then, as if moved by one impulse, the entire multitude of men suddenly left the square and rushed *en masse* to the polls. The astonished Callahan and his braves were again, to their amazement, left almost alone upon the square. The line of heelers and riff-raff, which filed in front of the caucus booth, and the two policemen detailed to preserve order at the caucus, were hustled and jostled out of the way. There was not much ceremony about it. Men were in no mood for ceremony. There was a momentary scuffle, to be sure, accompanied by wild cheers, curses and yells of derision. The two drum and fife corps assembled near the polls and added to the wild confusion of sound.

But, with all the uproar, there was method in the madness of the throng. Ballots for John Price were showering in at the window. The officers of the caucus occasionally ventured a mild protest, on the ground that some particular voter was not a resident of the Seventeenth Ward; but these protests were greeted with angry howls and jeers, and the caucus officers, although organization men, were completely overawed and intimidated.

They were beaten at their own game, and they were too well educated in American institutions to make much fuss about it. It was part of their creed that no one should be permitted to interfere with the inalienable right of an

American citizen to pack a caucus, and they were true to their own doctrines! Like most men, they had their own peculiar code of morality.

Meanwhile, Price, overcome by his exertions, feeble as they had been, fainted dead away, unconscious, broken in mind, body, and estate.

The threat of the Carthage Electric Company had been fulfilled!

"My mother, don't take me home to her," he had gasped. "It might kill her. Take me to the hospital and then tell her about it."

Poor Archie, upon whom all the disagreeable duties of the day had fallen, took his friend to the hospital, and then, as gently as possible, broke the news to Mrs. Price. With her he returned, and sat by the side of the sick man all through the long and weary night.

Price had been roughly handled. His right leg and two ribs were broken, and there were severe contusions all over his body; but the blow at the back of his head gave the physicians most concern. They feared concussion of the brain.

"You should have brought him here at once; that caucus may have been his death," reproved Dr. Agnew.

"Your son wished it," explained Dean, turning to Mrs. Price.

"You did right, it is better so," responded the mother,

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bravely. "I should never have forgiven you had you acted otherwise."

Toward morning there came a change for the worse, and the physicians began to despair.

"Poor Vivian," murmured Archie; "shall I send for her?"

"Perhaps," assented Mrs. Price, doubtfully.

"Don't you do it," protested a weak voice from the pillow; "I'll pull through yet. Did we win out, Archie?"

"Gloriously," replied his friend.

"Then I will show them all what stuff a Price is made of," said the ex-editor of the "Carthage News," as he glanced lovingly at his mother, and relapsed into a quiet slumber.

"That's good," whispered Dr. Agnew to the anxious watchers at the bedside.

CHAPTER XXI

WITHOUT ACCUSER

THE morning air blew sweet and fresh as Vivian Everett sat by her window. The lazy sun still refused to arise, though the milkman came with rattle of cans and cheery whistle; then passed the newsboy, throwing the folded morning paper upon the porch, from his perch on his bicycle. Vivian could just distinguish the urchin's figure, as he performed this feat in the dim light of a November morning.

It was for the arrival of the paper she had been waiting, and she now finished dressing hastily and made her way to the front door, where she struggled for some time with burglar chains and various ingenious locks and bolts which thwarted her impatience. Finally she glided across the porch and seized upon the damp folds of the sheet, upon which the ink was still wet. Hurrying within to the light she unfolded the paper, and her eyes met these headlines upon the first page:

DASTARDLY OUTRAGE!

**EDITOR JOHN PRICE SET UPON IN THE STREETS
OF CARTHAGE**

**BEATEN BY THUGS ON HIS WAY TO THE
SEVENTEENTH WARD CAUCUS**

**DRIVEN TO THE POLLS IN A HALF-DYING CON-
DITION BY MR. ARCHIBALD DEAN**

**DISGRACEFUL SCENES AT THE CAUCUS — PRICE
NOMINATED OVER THE ORGANIZATION CAN-
DIDATE AND HIS ELECTION SURE, BUT MAY
NOT LIVE TO TAKE HIS SEAT. — WHO IS RE-
SPONSIBLE?**

Vivian stared at the headlines as though she was actually witnessing the horrid panorama they described, for the moment dazed, benumbed by the catastrophe, which realized her most gloomy forebodings. She did not faint nor cry out, but was filled with that wild longing for instant action, — for doing something, that had made her so restless the previous evening. But now, at least, what she had to face was concrete, a crisis to be met, a situation to contend with, and she collected herself to meet

the emergency. He was dying, perhaps at that very moment breathing his last, — and she was not with him, could not go to him until the conventional hour arrived? “I’d like to see any one stop me,” she exclaimed, addressing the imaginary Mrs. Grundy who had interposed the objection.

It was in this frame of mind Vivian had determined to throw convention to the winds and set out for the hospital, all by herself, at seven o’clock in the morning, when she caught sight of her father creeping stealthily down the stairway, attired in his dressing-gown. His face had an ashen gray pallor, his eyes were sunken, his hand trembled as he reached for the latch of the front door; he seemed to have aged ten years in that single night.

After long search, Evans had found him at the “News” office, late the previous evening, and had told him the story of the fiasco in the Seventeenth Ward and of the assault on Price. If the man should die, both the conspirators knew that they would be held not altogether guiltless, — should the ugly facts come out in the course of the searching investigation that would be sure to follow upon the murder. In this appalling crisis, Evans the suave, Evans the cool manipulator of all sorts and conditions of men, the kindly comforter of the sick and afflicted, the arrogant “boss” of the city of Carthage, was in a pitiable state of funk.

"I never dreamed of this," he cried, "and I wish with all my heart that I had never been mixed up in the matter at all," and he fell to cursing the stupidity of Driscoll, Fagan, and the police, in an impotent fury of rage and chagrin.

Everett was sorely troubled, but being less closely involved, was more clear-headed. He called up Dr. Agnew at the hospital, on the telephone, and received a reassuring report. With this crumb of comfort he had sent Evans home and soon after went to join his wife at the reception and take her home. Arriving there he managed to avoid the eager questionings of Vivian and Electa, and retired to his room, where he passed a night of wretched misery.

Yes, he, too, was looking for the morning paper! It comes to all of us, that message from the great world of throbbing hearts, with the story of its power, passion, glory,—crime. The lady reads to find if her lover has returned, or if her friend be married; the financier reads to learn the fate of his latest speculation; the politician reads his own speech, the doctor of his own successful operation, the minister his own sermon, the lawyer his own plea,—with variant emotions; but the criminal, who reads the story of his own crime,—ah! to him the morning paper is the most crucial of all!

As Nathan Everett set his trembling fingers on the

latch, his daughter stepped into the hall. "I have the paper, father," she said calmly.

The banker started guiltily. "You, Vivian," he faltered, and then recovered himself with surprising celerity. Could she know anything about the case? "What are you doing at this unearthly hour?" he asked, in his usual tone of grave paternal kindness, "I am afraid you will catch cold, dear."

"Take me to him, father, at once," she said. "Mr. Price, I mean. We will go to the hospital together."

Everett and his daughter stood face to face for several moments without speaking. In the daughter's eyes the father read the story of her love, while his own betrayed the terror and remorse of a stricken conscience. What pen can tell the story of the eyes and reduce their tongue to common speech? It is enough to say that each saw, each understood, without word or sign.

"He lives, then, thank God!" exclaimed Everett at last, as he sank into a chair and covered his face with his hands.

"Is it possible to discuss the details now, father, or did you leave them all to Mr. Thomas Evans?" said his daughter's accusing voice, quietly cruel, conveying the bitterest reproaches in tones scarcely above a whisper.

"You heard?" he moaned.

"Yes."

"And you believe us guilty?"

"Yes. I know you to be guilty, though to what extent I dare not surmise. Like you, perhaps, I am ignorant of the details."


She almost found it in her heart to pity him, he seemed so old, so very old and careworn; but she was determined to know the whole truth.

"We are guilty, in a way," confessed Everett, in a husky voice. He was in a wretched condition, both mentally and physically. "But you do us an injustice, though I can scarcely blame you. There was to have been no violence to Price, so Evans assured me. He was to have been arrested and detained, that was all."

"Was n't that enough?" she asked, striving to suppress the contempt in her voice.

"I realize that it is an inadequate excuse, but the fact is, Vivian, we were in a desperate situation. Last night's fiasco has probably ruined us all, my girl. I have invested every dollar of my own fortune, your mother's, and even some of yours in the stock and bonds of the Carthage Electric Company. Price has beaten us. We have ousted him from the 'News,' but he will soon enter the city council, where his vote and his voice threaten to destroy us."

"That is the fortune of war, father. I am not afraid of poverty," said Vivian, "but I am afraid of other things; are n't you?"



"Not afraid of poverty!" her father exclaimed, suddenly springing to his feet and pacing the floor,—glad of any diversion that might relieve him for a moment from the terrible scrutiny of his daughter's accusing eyes. "Not afraid of poverty?" he repeated. "My child, do you know what the word means? Have you any conception of its trail of distress, degradation, sordid misery? The whole world is strewn with the wrecks wrought by it,—lost opportunities, stunted mental and physical development, rags, disease, death. Listen, my dear, I was poor as a boy, wretchedly poor. I once crept into a neighbor's cellar and stole a meal from his ice-box. I saw my old mother waste away and die there on the farm, and I could not give her the dainties, or the nursing, or the medicines she needed. Oh, the sordid cruelty of it!

"Then she passed away into the land where such wants are unknown, and I was free from loving bondage, free to face the world, and make my way in it,—alone. Well, I have been successful, until now, more than successful in the mere knack of money-getting, which, after all, is a trick one may learn, with a little native shrewdness. We have had a beautiful home, and I have been able to give you and your mother other things than mere money. I trust, though they are only made possible by it,—refined surroundings and the gratification of artistic tastes;—

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but don't tell me not to fear poverty, my child; it is the cruelest blight that can fall on any man or woman!"

"I have never heard you talk like that before, father," said the girl, very soberly. "Perhaps, after all, we do not really know each other, though we have lived together, in loving companionship, all our lives. Oh, father, father, what have you done to him? How have you treated him,—the man I love, adore, worship? You understand now, don't you? You realize that in striking down John Price, you have struck me; in wounding, crushing him, you have wounded, crushed me; that should John Price die, killed, in effect, by my father's own hand, I should die with him?"

"I see that it is so; but, even yet, I confess, I cannot understand it," replied Everett, with a heavy sigh. "Even in the face of this catastrophe, I cannot help protesting against it, Vivian. You must appreciate how the very thought of such a union for you pains me. I had hoped that you would find some one in your own station in life,—” and he hesitated, stopped short. He was in the mood to express vigorous disapproval of Price and all his works, to explain how impossible it would be for him to accept such a man as his son-in-law; but, somehow, he could not proceed, the very words stuck in his throat;—it was those blue eyes of hers, those searching, heart-questioning blue eyes, that checked him in the

midst of a sentence. Why was it he so shrank before their unspoken reproach, almost scorn?

"We can discuss all that after we return from the hospital," she said quietly. She was in no mood for explanation or recrimination just then. Her tense anxiety must be relieved at once, she could not endure another moment of delay. "Take me to him, take me there this moment," she wailed, breaking down at last, with heart-rending sobs; "can't you see that this suspense is killing me?"

Everett made no further attempt to expostulate with her, but hurried to the telephone, without more ado, and summoned a carriage. Together they were driven, through the still, gray dawn, to the Carthage General Hospital, where Dr. Agnew, who was just leaving for home, after a night of anxiety, met them and gave them cheerful tidings of the patient. The danger line was passed, he thought, if no symptoms of internal injuries developed during the day; but Price must have absolute rest, must see no one for at least forty-eight hours, and perhaps longer, commanded the physician. His mother and Archie Dean had left an hour ago.

Turning from the hospital, Vivian insisted that they should drive about the city until breakfast time. "We have gone along so blindly," she said, "and the time has come when we both need all the light we can give each

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other, — for a thorough mutual understanding.” Then she told her father the whole story of her love for Price, and his for her, and of all that had passed between them since they had first met. “You see,” she concluded, “it was not because of any wish to keep things from you, either on my part or on his, that you have remained in ignorance, but because of my own perverse heart, that would not recognize or answer to the call of love until it broke away all barriers, with a power that could not be denied. At all events, one thing is certain, this wretched controversy must come to an end now, or it will wreck the lives of all of us.”

“The whole situation is impossible,” cried Everett, “and what is worse, there seems to be no escape from impending ruin. The Carthage Electric stock has fallen so low since I bought it at what seemed the bottom price, that the banks are calling for more margin than I can give. We must win soon, or I must go under, and we are on the verge of utter defeat.”

“But can’t there be some compromise?” asked Vivian. “It is n’t the business of the city to ruin people, and I am sure Mr. Price never preached any such doctrine. He is not implacable like that.” The girl felt that this was her great opportunity to unite the interests of her father and her lover, and was prepared to strike while the iron was hot.

"He is as remorseless and implacable as death itself," pronounced Everett, "as irreconcilable as the red republicans of the French Revolution."

"But he believes himself to be right," pleaded Vivian.

"What is that to me?" demanded her father. "It is your self-righteous fanatic that does more real harm in the world than many men who are wholly vicious."

"But did you ever take the trouble to ask what it is that he is contending for, — did you ever go to him in any other spirit than that of trying to buy his services for so much cash?" demanded the girl.

"He is a rank socialist; he wants to plunder the rich for the benefit of the poor," stormed Everett, growing angry in his effort to justify himself.

"I happen to know that you are mistaken, both in the man and concerning his principles," asserted the young girl, with firm gentleness, though her cheeks flushed and her eyes flashed blue fire, as she suppressed the indignant words that arose to her lips. "If we are guilty of this dreadful outrage, committed in the cause of our own greed," she continued, "can we keep on scheming and plotting in the same cause? Must we not do something to repair the wrong?"

"Don't say 'we'; don't include yourself in this wretchedness, child," pleaded Everett, placing his hand softly on hers. She was all the world to him.

"Why not?" she asked, soberly. "I am yours, father, as well as his. It is for me you are grasping, striving, seeking at least to keep our fortune, if not to increase it; and it is for me, for me, you understand, dear, that John Price, too, is fighting, bravely, too bravely, for what he believes to be right and true and just."

"I wish I had known all this before, Vivian," said her father, sadly. He was not a stern parent, this man of mammon, and wished, above all else in life, to watch over the happiness of his only child.

"It is never too late, is it?" she said, as she ran her fingers through his gray hair, and gently smoothed his forehead.

"Too late for what?"

"To find out what is best and right, and do it?"

"The trouble is that you and your quixotic editor are too impractical," said Everett, more calmly, for he was much comforted and softened by his daughter's gentle ministrations. "In this crass world of ours such high-souled knight-errantry is out of place, my dear. Even in the ancient days it must have been inconvenient for the miller to have his windmill knocked to pieces by a noble warrior, but in modern times, when the world is run by electricity, not wind, we can't have its nicely adjusted motors and intricate machinery hammered into bits after any such fashion."

"And yet, father, you confess, tactily, that you have never, as a matter of fact, asked Mr. Price what he wants for the city,—not for himself," persisted Vivian, not to be swerved from her purpose by her father's superior worldly wisdom and knowledge of affairs. "I can't talk to you as he can, and should not try,—but he says that it is far more ruinous for your company to pay blackmail to a greedy horde of politicians, than to pay what is fair and right to the city for the privileges you require. He says that until the business men of a city learn that when they rob it they rob themselves, there can never be anything but corruption and wastefulness in the management of public affairs, and ultimate loss to the whole community."

"Fine theories, but it is n't business," sneered Everett, impatiently.

"But Mr. Price says that you will have to face his theories as a practical necessity, that he will fight you and Mr. Evans and all the rest until you do, and he seems something more than a mere theorist, when it comes to an actual controversy. You have done your worst against him, and he is still in the ascendant. If you won't admit that his fight is practical, you can at least see the nobility and power of it. There he lies in the hospital, just barely escaped from death, martyred for his cause, his paper taken from him, robbed of his health, his property, every-

thing men ordinarily prize in the struggle of life, and yet he comes through it all victorious! From his bed of pain he will dictate terms to all of you, and you will have to listen to what he says, whether you will or no, for it is just and true and right, and every one respects him. That is why, father, I'd rather have his love and be his wife than make the most splendid social match mother could desire, or marry the richest man in all the world."

Everett looked into his daughter's face, lighted by the fires of love and enthusiasm, and it came to him that his little girl had developed into a beautiful woman; moreover, that she had intellect as well as heart. In spite of himself he felt a thrill of paternal pride, and sympathized with her in her glorification of her lover more than he would admit, even to himself.

"I know it, I believe it, Vivy," he said, "though it is n't just what I might have wished. I will concede that he has a high sense of honor, — and even some business ability withal, in his own particular line. I admit that I was astonished last night, when I went over the books of the 'News,' to see how he had built up the property in a few short months. With all his fanaticism, he is no mere dreamer; his worst enemy must give him that much credit."

Vivian was the very apple of his eye. In the nature

of things he couldn't hold out against her very long, without the support upon which he secretly reckoned from his better half. "But you are not going to have an easy time with your mother," he added; "I know that her heart is set upon your making a brilliant match."

"Mother and I would never agree on that subject, in any event," observed Vivian, somewhat indifferently, for her mother's opinions were apt to have but little weight with her. With all his faults, Everett had always held a much closer grasp upon his daughter's affections, a tie that grew stronger with advancing years, for Vivian was distinctly "her father's girl."

"I never could endure the men she picks out for me," continued his daughter, "and I am afraid I would become a spinster long before she succeeded in finding a man who suited both herself and me."

"None the less, you had better tell her about it at once and see what she has to say," suggested Everett, rather welcoming any diversion from the thoughts that still pursued him, and more than willing to cast the burden of dealing with Vivian's affair upon his wife's shoulders.

It was not a happy or united family that gathered about the breakfast table, for Mrs. Everett was fairly hysterical at the very notion of a union between her daughter and the ex-editor, whom she pronounced "a coarse, common fellow, who could never be admitted to a decent club,

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and could not support a wife, even in his own station in life."

Vivian did the best she could to be gentle, as well as firm with her mother, but that lady's virulent tongue was more than she could endure under the circumstances and she burst into tears.

"Are n't you rather too harsh with her, Clara?" demanded Everett, much disturbed, though more or less inclined to his wife's point of view.

"No, Nathan," protested his wife. "Some member of the family must remain firm in this matter and retain some sort of poise. Vivian always could twist you around her little finger, and the present is a glaring instance of it."

"Fudge!" exclaimed her husband, much annoyed by the obvious truism.

"Now, Vivian, don't be a baby," commanded her mother, "and listen to a little wholesome common sense. I can't control you; but I have some rights, and propose to assert them. Until Mr. Price is at least able to demonstrate that he can support a wife in your station in life, I shall refuse to receive him at my house, or give any social sanction to your engagement."

Vivian, who could bear no more, arose and left the table without another word.

CHAPTER XXII

STILL IN THE RING

WHEN John Price awoke from dreamless slumber, about eleven o'clock on the morning following the caucus he endeavored to collect his faculties and remember just what had happened to him. The very fact that he was lying in bed at all when the sun was high in the heavens was strange enough, but the moment he tried to move he realized how stiff and lame he was in every fibre of his body. At last he managed to raise his hands to his head, and then withdrew them as he uttered an exclamation of astonishment: "Why, it's only normal size, after all," he muttered. "I thought it must be swollen to the dimensions of a balloon, it feels so light and so big."

"Hush," cautioned the white-capped young woman at his bedside.

But this admonition only served to arouse him from his state of semi-consciousness. "Please send at once for Attorney Davidson and a stenographer," he commanded, as soon as he was fairly awake.

"Dr. Agnew forbids you even to speak," was the nurse's

answer. "We cannot let you have any visitors at all, for at least a week."

Price stared at her suspiciously; he was not quite himself as yet. "Do they think they are going to hold me prisoner?" he queried, rebelliously. "I'd like to see them try it. I am in a mood to bring half a dozen lawsuits this morning, and would rather enjoy suing some one for false imprisonment, while I am about it."

"Really, sir, you must be calm and rest. Absolute rest is the command, sir," pleaded the young woman. "Do please lie back on the pillow. I shall be blamed severely if you don't,—discharged, perhaps."

"I'd like to see any one dare discharge you on that account. I'd have Attorney Davidson mandamus him to reinstate you, instantly," fretted Price, with a grim smile. He was in a litigious mood that morning, and consciously cross.

"What an awful pother over a broken head," he continued, querulously. "I'd have licked the whole drunken crew if it had n't been so dark I could n't see to dodge the sandbag. Whew! how my head aches," and he leaned back upon his pillow, wearily.

"That's right, sir, rest yourself and you will be well all the sooner," said the nurse, soothingly.

"And let knaves and cut-throats walk the streets of Carthage scot free, to boast that they have done me out?

Not much!" cried the sick man, struggling up again, though he could scarcely repress a sharp cry of pain his sudden movement had occasioned. "I'm more badly hurt than I supposed," he acknowledged, "but there are some things that must be done while I have the strength for them. Please send for Attorney Davidson at once. I can't let these physicians dictate to me."

The poor little nurse was quite alarmed. She had n't much experience in ministering to a wounded lion, and Price fairly resembled one in his rage of unreasoning impatience. As a matter of fact, he had never before known a day's illness in his life, and was scarcely well versed in the etiquette of the sick room.

The house physician, who now hurried to his side at the instance of the nurse, endeavored to soothe the editor's irritable impatience, and warned him that even a slight imprudence might seriously retard his recovery. But Price insisted that there were matters of importance which called for his immediate attention and admitted of no delay; and the physician became convinced that the man's ardent spirit would soon wear out his bodily strength were it not given some vent. So, early in the afternoon, Price was permitted to have an interview with his attorney and dictate a number of letters to a stenographer.

Davidson was instructed at once to bring an action

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against Colonel Parkerson for breach of contract, with a demand for specific performance of the agreement to turn over the "News" stock. "I want that action brought this very afternoon," declared Price. "I want them all to know that I am still in the ring and able to insist upon my rights in the very teeth of the worst that force and fraud can accomplish against me."

"I think you have a very good chance to win your case," observed Davidson. "In fact, I do not believe they will ever let it come to trial."

"Of course they won't; but it's the delay they are playing for," chafed Price. "How long do you suppose they will be able to tie me up in litigation?"

"Oh, for a year or more," returned the man of law, nonchalantly. He had been asked a similar question by impatient clients before.

"For a year or more!" exclaimed the editor. "The law won't help me much in the present fight, then. Well, perhaps we may turn the tables on them and take the law into our own hands, before we are through with them," he muttered.

"How about the men who assaulted you?" queried the attorney. "Have you any suspicions, any evidence upon which I could file an information for you?"

"I have more than mere suspicion," returned Price, with a smile of triumph. "I shall hold that card up my

sleeve and play trumps when they least expect it. The leader of the gang who attacked me is the prize-fighter known as 'The Red Spider.' I recognized him instantly. Spare no pains or expense to put your hands on that man, for he knows all about the story, and who was actually behind the business; and if handled rightly, he can be brought to time and made to tell what he knows."

"That should be easy," remarked Davidson, confidently. "The fellow runs a low dive in the suburbs, does n't he?"

"Nominally only. His backers use his fame among the toughs and bruisers as an advertisement. But he won't be found there for many a long day. He will have left the city, perhaps the State. We have to deal with a cunning crew, Davidson, who will stop at nothing to cover their tracks in this business; but we will beat them at their own game before the hand is played out."

"That's the way to talk," encouraged the lawyer, "and you can rely on me. I will lay the matter before my friend, the district attorney, this very afternoon, and we will soon be hot on the scent."

"I really thought you had more sense," fumed Price, impatiently. "Please bear in mind that you can't trust your best friend in this business, — if Tom Evans has a string on him. Keep away from the district attorney, the sheriff, the police, and public officers generally. Keep your own counsel, as far as you can; the ramifications of

the machine extend into every branch of the city's life; for goodness' sake don't make the blunder of playing into their hands by handling this business as you would an ordinary crime. This is an unusual case, and we must meet the situation by unusual methods or nothing will be accomplished. Get hold of Allie Latham, who was with me on the 'News'; he 'd go through fire and water for me, and what is more, he outclasses any lunkhead of a detective. He could give cards and spades to the whole Carthage police force, and play rings around them at that."

"I will see him at once," promised Davidson. "What shall I tell him?"

"Give him your check for five hundred dollars and this assurance of immunity to the Red Spider, which I managed to scrawl here on the bed, this morning, when the nurse was out of the room. When he sees that, and has his pockets well lined, with promise of more, the Red Spider will be only too glad to return to Carthage, for he has nothing to fear from any one else."

"You think he will dare turn States' evidence against his employers?"

"I think he will be useful to me. The matter may never get into court," returned Price, with an inscrutable smile. "Tell Allie Latham to find the Red Spider at any cost, travel to the end of the earth, search the four

corners of the globe, if necessary, but to find that man and bring him back to Carthage as soon as possible."

Davidson was filled with natural curiosity as to his client's plans, but Price took no man into his confidence further than the necessity of the occasion required, so the lawyer went away to carry out his instructions, leaving the wounded editor dictating to his stenographer.

As a matter of fact, Price felt instinctively that the Red Spider was the key to the whole situation. If he could only manage to lay his hands on the bruiser, he was confident that several persons would be in his power who richly deserved any punishment he saw fit to inflict. The prize-fighter was well known to be a henchman of Patrick Fagan. It was even whispered that Fagan drew a large income from the disreputable place conducted nominally by the Red Spider. Price, therefore, had strong foundation for the suspicion that the latter could tell an interesting story if he would. If this was the case, however, no pains would be spared to keep the fellow in hiding until the storm blew over, and only measures the most prompt and effective would succeed in locating him. It was largely on this account that Price had been so insistent with nurse and physician.

Now that this important undertaking had fairly been set afoot, he breathed a sigh of relief and proceeded to dictate several letters, wishing to let his loved ones know

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that he was improving rapidly, even though they were not permitted to see him. He wrote cheerfully to Dean and his mother of his speedy recovery, and of his determination to fight it out to a finish, despite temporary disability. To Vivian he addressed his first letter: "It has to be in cold type and by means of an amanuensis," he said, "but you will understand why, and why I say so little. These are trying times, but fear nothing. I shall get on my feet and win out yet."

To Nathan Everett he wrote: "Kindly call upon me at your earliest convenience, as there are matters of mutual importance that I should discuss with you immediately. I think it is hardly necessary to say that I should not ask you to do this, unless it were essential."

When Dr. Agnew called, later in the afternoon, he found his patient in a high fever, and was much concerned at his condition. There had been a decided turn for the worse owing to Price's determined imprudence, and it was a week or more before he could again be fairly pronounced on the road to recovery. Nature asserted herself and gave orders in place of the physician, which she sternly enforced with an authority the doctor had been unable to exercise, compelling the strong man to bow to her laws, whether he would or no; and so, when Nathan Everett called, as he did at once, he was told that he would be unable to see the editor for some days.

Meantime the results of the caucus had begun to manifest themselves. The election of Price was a foregone conclusion, in fact, no opposition candidate was placed in the field. The machine had been thoroughly whipped in the Seventeenth and did not care to venture a second contest there immediately.

Moreover, fresh allies were thronging to the standard of Price. Hitherto the other Carthage newspapers had rather held aloof. It was n't newspaper ethics to interfere in a controversy instituted and carried on exclusively by the "News." But the outrage upon the editor, coupled with his triumphant victory over the organization, combined to make him the popular hero of the hour, and the cause which he had championed so clearly became the popular cause; so that the other local papers felt compelled to fall in line, ostensibly at least, or stand accused of sympathizing with lawless politics and an impudently grasping monopoly.

The aldermen who had been wavering on the franchise question now hastened to repudiate the Carthage Electric Company, and several of them went so far as to notify Evans that they could not be relied upon, in this instance, to vote in accordance with his dictates.

That worthy was both chagrined and alarmed. His power was tottering, and his most carefully matured plans had gone awry. What more natural than that

he should begin to consider an adroit treason against his corporate allies, whereby he might reinstate himself? At a conference with the directors of the Carthage Electric Company, he was forced to admit that, in the present state of public feeling, it would be suicide to attempt forcing the franchise through the council.

"We had better wait until spring," he counselled: "a new set of aldermen will then come up for election, and the present excitement will have subsided. We should be able to slide the thing through by that time without any trouble. Meanwhile you will be able to run your cars, and collect fares, as before; franchise or no franchise, you can still keep on doing business at the old stand, with no one to molest you. What more do you want?"

"All of which amounts to this," interposed Everett: "you can't deliver the goods, though you assume to control the political situation in this city. I am sick of this business, and do not propose to deal with you any further."

"Oh, give Mr. Evans a chance," temporized Bleeker, who could see no other course open, though just as much disappointed in the turn of affairs as his associate.

But Nathan Everett had guessed that the politician was merely playing with them, and had no faith in promises that left them all in the lurch until the following

spring, when matters were quite as likely to be worse as they were to have improved, and was determined to break with Evans at all hazards. "Give him as much chance as you choose," he retorted, "I'm through with it, and I want that distinctly understood."

Everett felt that whatever the other directors of the corporation might decide to do he could have no further dealings with the politician and preserve any self-respect. Moreover, the best that Evans promised would be too late for him. Unless something turned up in his favor long before spring, he was a ruined man.

"You may perhaps not secure your franchise, even with my help," called Evans, as Everett reached the door, "but you certainly can't get it without me; that has already been demonstrated."

Everett deigned no reply, though the shot struck home. Evans was probably right; in any case he had found the pretext he wanted for deserting his allies of the Carthage Electric whose unpopularity now threatened his ruin. The alliance between the corporation and the "boss," usually so effective in American politics, had thus far proved fruitful of nothing but disaster. It was only natural that mutual recriminations should follow, and that either or both should seek occasion for deserting a losing cause.

In truth, Evans had already begun to see that the only

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line of tactics left to him was to come out boldly for municipal control of the street railway lines. Both as an opportunity for unlimited graft and popular *kudos*, the policy, if successful, presented greater possibilities of a rake-off than the pre-arranged corrupt agreement with the Carthage Electric Company, and he was now determined to take this position and turn to his own advantage the hue and cry that had been raised against the corporation. He even counted with some confidence upon the assistance of Price in this new turn of the controversy.

In view of the present state of public feeling he could see no chance of failure, and the versatile politician anticipated a rich harvest of power and patronage as a result.

CHAPTER XXIII

GRAY ROSES

THE meteoric flight of Mr. Archibald Dean across the political firmament was the chief topic of conversation at all the clubs. When he lunched at the "Down Town," it was: "How 's the Champion of the People?" or, "Behold the idol of the masses!" or, "Speech, speech! let 's have that speech!"

At the Chester Avenue Century Club, where the sentiment against Price and his doctrines was especially strong, the general jocularly was often mingled with a trace of contempt.

"Did you really know for which side you were speaking, Archie?" queried Colonel Bliss, with an affectation of intense curiosity. "I don't suppose you intended to be a weathercock, but some of your remarks as reported in the papers would seem to indicate that you had deserted the cause of the conservative, and come out flat-footed for socialism. Did you mean them to take you seriously, or was it sarcasm?"

Archie endeavored to ignore the old colonel, who really bothered him, and wandered into the library, to run into a

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gang of "young bloods" who regarded his maiden effort at public oratory as extremely funny.

"Did you shake hands with all the coal-heavers, Dean?" asked one. "He'll be kissing all the babies in Carthage when he runs for Congress," suggested another. "Shocking idea; he might catch the measles or the cholera infantum," cried a third, holding up his hands with mock horror.

"Never you mind, you silly jays," retorted Dean. "I was more of a man last night than I have ever been before, and probably more of a man than I shall ever be again; and what is more, I will discount any one of you at a game of billiards."

He escaped the grilling for the moment, as the crowd thronged into the billiard room; but here Robert Bleeker and Professor DuBois were just finishing a match at pool, and the president of the Carthage Electric Company turned to greet the attorney for that corporation with brow of wrath. "What in the devil has got into you, Dean?" he demanded. "Since when did you turn socialist? What do you mean by turning down all your friends and going over to the enemy like that?"

"My retainer from the Carthage Electric does n't cover my political opinions," observed Dean, as he coolly chalked his cue.

"Let him alone; he's a child of the people," cried one



of the younger set, whereat there was a deafening thumping of cues on the floor.

"We'll see about that," snorted Bleeker, "you've had your last retainer from me, anyhow."

"It's bad form to talk politics here, at least," retorted Dean, and Professor DuBois agreed. So Robert Bleeker suppressed his indignation until a more convenient season, but he then and there resolved that the board of directors should select new legal counsel, if he had any voice in the matter.

"I can't understand what can have possessed the fellow to act against his own interests and suddenly attack all his friends without excuse or shadow of warning," muttered Bleeker to DuBois, as the pair watched the traitor to the cause of monopoly make a skilful *massé* shot.

"I think he was carried away by the spirit of the hour, and said things he would never have dreamed of saying anywhere else," surmised the professor, audibly.

"I'm no such fool as that," retorted Dean, overhearing him. "When you get right down to brass tacks, we are all highway robbers, more or less," and so saying, he made a difficult "draw" and brought his balls to anchor in the corner.

"Hear, hear!" shouted the younger men, laughing and thumping their cues again.

With all his assumed indifference Archie could not help


being affected by the almost universal disapprobation he seemed to meet in every direction among his intimate associates, who were, of course, ignorant of the details of the case, and began to feel that he had, perhaps, really done something to be ashamed of. He was peculiarly sensitive to the opinions and prejudices of his own set, and it was in no very comfortable frame of mind he called at the Everetts' that afternoon to see Electa. "I suppose she will have something unpleasant to say also," he muttered.

But in this he was pleasantly disappointed. Electa greeted him with shining eyes and a look of intense admiration. "Oh, I am so proud of you," she cried. "I knew it was in you, sir, but I was afraid you were too much of a cynic ever to let yourself go — ever to do anything in real dead earnest."

"And you don't think it was cheap, and underbred, and that sort of thing?" queried Dean, not entirely sure he did n't think so himself.

"It was grand, noble, inspiring. You can be a great man, if you choose, Archie," declared the little woman, stretching up to hold the lapels of his coat with two pink hands; "and don't be ashamed of what is best in you, let it come out."

"They have been laughing at me all over town. You don't understand the situation, Electa," he demurred, doubtfully.



"Yes I do, perfectly," she said. "You live in a little circle of two or three hundred that regards itself as the *crème de la crème* of two or three hundred thousand; but it is n't; it's the skimmed milk."

"The superficial mind looks for cream on the surface of the milk, while the profound philosopher dives down deep below," quoted Dean.

"Don't you think you're funny!" retorted Electa, with a *moue*. "Imagine a philosopher looking for cream at the bottom of the pan! It's just like them, though, and you pretend to be one, yourself, so you see what silly things they are."

"I shall not allow you to talk like that after we are married," said Dean, shaking his finger at her.

"Of course not," she rejoined; "for you will be my King, my overlord; but we are n't married yet, so I can have some opinions of my own — and seriously, Archie, one of them is that you should n't pay any attention to foolish jibes from silly people when you have the approbation of good and wise ones."

Electa had some of the altruistic idealism of her big cousin, and had already begun to exert a steadying influence upon the keen-minded but vacillating Dean, promising to bring him a rich dower of energetic purpose.

Vivian, also, made him understand that he was now wholly reinstated in her good graces by the ample amends

he had made for his former recreancy, and in return, Archie Dean undertook the defence of Price with Mrs. Everett.

"He will be a great man, some day, when he breaks away from merely provincial concerns and widens the scope of his influence and his sphere of action. There is no stopping that man, Mrs. Everett," urged Dean to the editor's prospective mother-in-law.

"But he could never shine in society, even if he were elected President of the United States," retorted she. In her view it might not be better "to be right than to be President," but it was distinctly better to be a man of *ton* than either. "We have had many governors and even Presidents who were not received socially, and whose wives and daughters were simply impossible," she added.

"You need not worry about that in the case of Price," urged Dean, "for he comes of the best stock in New England, — even if his marriage to an Everett were not sufficient; besides, it's getting to be good form to be a governor."

"That's well enough for you to say, but you know that Mr. Price does n't belong to a single club in the city of Carthage," she protested.

"I'm sure he goes to a bowling club," said Dean, laughing; "but some day you and Vivian will be claiming

that he is too much of a club-man and passes too many evenings away from home."

"For goodness' sake don't bring that to pass," protested Electa; "he's enough outside interests as it is, with his newspaper and his politics."

"Never fear, Electa, it is n't in him," sniffed Mrs. Everett.

"As for that," remarked Dean, skillfully playing a trump card with well-affected nonchalance, "Price has just been elected to the Pegasus Club as a protest against this outrage; but then, we are nothing but a mutual admiration society; represent all classes of public opinion; read ponderous papers at each other; and try to look owlish when we are insufferably bored."

Though somewhat mollified, for Dean was a favorite with her, Mrs. Everett was determined not to show it. "What has to be, has to be," she said with a wry smile of resignation to the will of an inscrutable Providence; "but I wish it were otherwise."

"I see the making in her of a first-class mother-in-law," whispered Dean to Electa, a little later; "but he is lucky enough, as it is."

"Oh, wait until you see my mother, when you come to Providence, next month," she returned, pertly; "you won't be so facetious then on the subject of mothers-in-law."

"I have always understood that she was a lovely woman," observed Dean.

"Do you suppose I would have you understand anything else?"

"But you seemed to think I should make discoveries."

"Oh, you will, — both of you."

"What does that imply?"

"Nothing, only you will have to be very good, — there are some things about you she will not approve of at all."

"You alarm me; what, for instance?"

"Well, for one thing, she's temperance."

"Really? Won't she let me have a cocktail now and then?" pleaded Archie.

"No, she would n't. Please don't even mention such a thing to her. I'll see that you have one, on the sly, as often as is good for you."

It was while Archie was making his valiant efforts to smooth the path of true love with Mrs. Everett that Vivian and her father seized the opportunity to steal away and make another visit to the hospital. Price had not yet recovered from his relapse, though Dr. Agnew hoped that he would be able to receive visitors in the course of a few days.

Mrs. Price happened to be in the waiting-room, and Vivian took advantage of the opportunity to introduce her father, who was much impressed by the lady's elegance of manner.

Then something familiar in her face and voice awakened long forgotten memories. Was it possible that they were one and the same? this wrinkled, gray lady, with the placid face, and thin, proud lips, and that slip of a girl with the ruddy-brown hair, fair forehead and cheeks delicately pink, who had been in his mother's Sunday-school class, in the long ago; and who came to see her on the lonely farm, driving five miles from the village to bring flowers to the sick woman, and comforts more substantial than flowers?

Yes, it was no other than she, who had seemed like a princess out of a story-book to the poverty-stricken country boy, whose life had been one long struggle to keep up the old place, since his father's death.

In no other country of the world, perhaps, are such rapid changes of fortune, and hence of social *status*, possible. But the proverbial progress from shirt-sleeves to shirt sleeves is all too common in America. As a young girl Mrs. Price had been quite as far above Nathan Everett as Vivian was now, by her mother, believed to be the superior of John Price.

But it was other than the shifting keys of the social scale, or any financial or worldly consideration, that now caused a mist to gather before the eyes of Nathan Everett, as the memory of those visits, in the bloom of her beauty, to the bedside of his dying mother, came over him.

He could see the great clock on the wall, and hear its echo of infinity, the large square room, the old-fashioned mirror, the picture of St. John the Baptist, the narrow, many-paned windows, and through the windows the bushes of white and purple lilacs, where waited the carriage of the gentle visitor. He could see the thin, old face on the pillow, and the bright, loving one that bent over it, whispering words of cheer.

"Mrs. Price," he said, at length, with a choke in his voice, "a young woman once left a purse on the pillow of a helpless invalid. Such loans to the love of God cannot be repaid, and yet —"

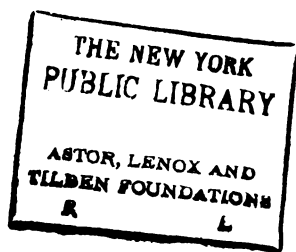
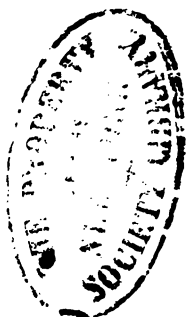
"No, Mr. Everett," replied Mrs. Price, with sweet dignity, "but there are many things of another sort you can do — for my son!" and there was a break in her voice, also, and gray roses in her cheeks, as their hands met over the grave of the past.

"It shall be my duty and my privilege to welcome him as my son-in-law," murmured Everett. "Come, Vivian!"

So prayers and tears and tender memories gathered round and joined hands about the bedside of John Price.



**“ Mrs. Price, a young woman once left a purse on the pillow of
a helpless invalid.” *Page 264***



CHAPTER XXIV

SUBTLE ALCHEMY

NATHAN EVERETT passed other restless nights, but those wakeful hours were fruitful of a mighty struggle and a firm resolve. The events of the last week had shaken his very philosophy of life, and disturbed his most deeply fixed habits of mind and thought. The pale face of the young man whose ruin he had thought to accomplish, and for whose broken condition he was indirectly responsible, haunted him; for this man was the son of the lost lady of old years, — and his own daughter's lover.

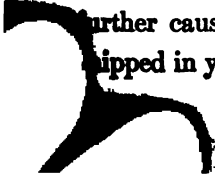
These ties, coupled with remorse, on the one hand swayed him towards the bedside of Price; while, on the other, the worship of the Golden Calf held him bowed before the False God. Why had he so rashly risked his whole fortune in a single venture? he asked himself, again and again, with vain repetition. It had seemed so easy, so simple a way to double, triple his wealth, and now his whole hoard was likely to slip from his grasp.

He looked about at the adornments of his spacious apartment and thought of the contrast they presented to the days on the old farm. Then he reviewed his long career, the pinching of pennies here and there by sordid econo-

mies and shifts, of the small start he had accomplished through the sale of the old homestead, of his rapid rise to opulence, as one successful speculation followed another; of his marriage and the additional capital his wife's ample patrimony had brought him; of the way his wealth had accumulated, like a rolling ball of snow, often by riding, rough-shod, over men weaker and less shrewd; so had he won to the upper rounds of the ladder, and tasted the elegance of wealth, as well as its power, — was it now all to vanish in the twinkling of an eye, like food on the tables of the starving, at the flapping of the Harpy's wing?

Well, suppose it did? What then? Vivian would n't suffer, for Price would be able to protect her, to shield her from all harm, and she would be happy. The young man was shrewd, and able and bound to achieve business success in spite of his theories, — perhaps, even, because of them. So much for the daughter; what of her mother?

Everett sighed. He knew that serious reverse of fortune would be a heavy blow to his wife; but let come what might, he had fought the good fight, and won it. There should be an end to this controversy over the franchise; that he had finally resolved upon. It had already brought him severe financial loss. It should n't mean his own moral ruin and the wreck of his daughter's happiness as well, nor any further cause of grief to the woman whom he had worshipped in youth as an angel of sweetness and light.



And so it came about that Nathan Everett one night made up his mind to clasp John Price by the hand, ask his forgiveness, assure him that the "News" stock would be restored to him, and that, for his part, all further effort to continue the franchise controversy would be abandoned.

Immediately after breakfast the next morning he hastened to the hospital, and a few minutes later was ushered into John Price's room.

The young man was sitting up in bed, propped by pillows, and he extended his hand to the banker, while a bright smile illumined his wan face. "I am so much obliged to you for coming to see me so soon," he said.

When thus given ocular demonstration of how badly Price had been hurt, how narrowly he had missed passing through the Valley of the Shadow, Everett's remorse and contrition for the part he had allowed himself to play in the affair were freshly aroused, for he was shocked to see what inroads a week's illness had made upon the man's stalwart frame.

"My poor boy," he said, as he clasped the young man's hand in both of his, "I cannot express the gratitude I feel for your recovery, when I think what your death would have meant to me — as well as to others!" and, in a broken voice, he told of the entire plot, so far as he was concerned in it, which had culminated in the seizure of the "News" and the assault on Price.

"As far as I can I am going to make immediate reparation," he added. "You will not have to prosecute your lawsuit, for we will hold the stock subject to your option; so you can continue your payments to us, when you are able, as you did to Parkerson, and from this hour the control of the 'News' is yours, just as it was before, and every man connected with it subject to your orders."

Price was naturally gratified, elated, by this concession, though it was no more than the law would probably have given him ultimately, after her proverbial delay, — and he endeavored to express his appreciation, but Everett interrupted him.

"Not a word, my boy; so much is only your just due. The next thing you are entitled to is an apology from me, though that is poor enough amends for what you have suffered. Frankly, as man to man, I ask your forgiveness."

"I never held either you or Mr. Evans personally responsible," assured Price, "and what you have said only serves to confirm my suspicion of the true state of the case. I know the gang to whom the manœuvre was intrusted, — they were not expected to do me any physical injury, — but the fellows took advantage of political conditions to pay off an old score, a private grudge they owed me for the way I had shown up their dive. Neither of you anticipated that, or were to blame for it."

"You are very kind to put it that way," his visitor

responded, "but our excuses are lame, at best, and we can only thank good fortune that the result of our reckless folly was no more serious. I tell you, Price, it has been a lesson to me. I am not made of the stuff that can stand this sort of thing. I was drawn into it, deeper and deeper, and it seemed the only way to win; but I am going to quit, step down and out; I've notified Tom Evans of that determination, and Bleeker, and all the rest. I'm done, — through with the whole beastly business."

"Naturally I am rejoiced to hear it," exclaimed Price, "for now you may be willing to use your influence with your company to pay the city a fair charge for a lease of the trolley lines."

"What do you mean by that? I thought you opposed a franchise on any terms?" gasped Everett, much astonished.

As a matter of fact, in their eagerness to grasp the whole loaf, the Carthage Electric directors had failed to consider that half of that loaf might be better than no bread at all. They had been in no mood to read the editorials in the "News" with patience or understanding, and hence had no just conception of the position which the editor had taken from the outset of the controversy.

Price now proceeded to unfold his views in detail. In his opinion municipal operation of public franchises was the ideal solution, but unpractical, previous to the millennium. In a pure democracy, whose very essence was

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thrift and individual enterprise, he thought such a solution highly undesirable, and, in view of prevailing political conditions, a serious menace. In any event, during the transition period, while the problems of city government were being worked out to a safe and sane solution, he believed that private enterprise could best operate the city's public utilities, paying a fair rental to the city and still making a good profit for the stockholders. He renewed the proposition that he had made in the early days of the controversy to Bleeker, that the Electric Company pay the city a rental of \$500,000 a year, being three per cent of the estimated value of the franchise, as well as its fair share of municipal taxes upon its plant, and undertook to demonstrate to Everett, by facts and figures, that this could be done while the company continued to pay reduced but substantial dividends to its stockholders, and interest on the bonded indebtedness of the road.

A month before, Everett would not have listened to the plan for a moment, or conceded that it was at all practical; but he had now seen a new light, and had come to Price prepared to surrender completely, though it meant financial ruin to himself. Under the editor's plan, while he would not greatly increase his wealth, he would lose very little as the result of his wild plunge in Carthage Electric stock, and in the course of time might be able to unload it at a fair profit.

Everett was essentially a speculator, and not a practical railroad man, but he had a keen insight into facts and figures, and was soon convinced that Price had a clear understanding of the situation. Seeing a chance to save himself from financial shipwreck, he naturally grasped at the opportunity.

"Do you think you could put your scheme through the council?" he asked, anxiously.

"I can try, at all events," returned Price.

"Of course Evans will oppose it."

"Undoubtedly," returned the editor, "for the simple reason that there is nothing in it for him, while, if the city runs the railroad, he will practically be its superintendent. It is because Evans, and men like him, dominate the city's politics that we can't afford to have the municipality go into any business enterprise, even if such a course were sound in theory."

"I hope you can win," said Everett, doubtfully. "Evans told us that, while we might not get the franchise with all the help he could give us, we certainly could not get it without him."

"None the less you must win without him, or you can never make the business pay," declared Price. "It's the constant tribute he would levy on you through the years that would ruin you; can't you see that?"

"He is a rapacious rascal, and I am sorry I ever had

anything to do with him," declared Everett, forgetting his own delinquencies in the contemplation of those of Thomas Evans.

"He is a very able man, none the less," said Price, soberly, "and will prove very difficult to defeat, but we will be in the right, Mr. Everett, and we will make the people understand it; that is why I am confident of ultimate victory."

At this point the nurse entered to caution the visitor that his interview should not be prolonged much further; and by this time Price had learned the reasonableness of hospital discipline, and conformed to it with due docility, — for he was wildly anxious to get on his feet again and play his part in the events of the day.

As Everett arose to depart the editor once more extended his hand. "I — I — suppose you know about — about Vivian?" he stammered.

"Yes, my boy," said Everett, heartily; "and we are going to be the best of friends; we should have been such long ago, had we understood each other."

It was thus Nathan Everett gave a father's consent; but the mother was yet to be heard from.

CHAPTER XXV

FORLORN HOPE

PPRICE continued to gain strength rapidly, and though it was not thought prudent for him to leave the hospital, his bedroom there became a veritable workshop, — the editorial room of the "News," and the centre of attraction to all the capitalists and politicians who favored his plan for a lease of the trolley lines to the Carthage Electric, at the substantial rental he had proposed and now continued to advocate in the columns of his paper, with his vigorous and incisive pen.

But many men, particularly the labor unions and the more radical theoretical enthusiasts, who had hitherto opposed the extension of the franchise, under the leadership of Price, were unwilling to accept his practical conclusions.

They argued that the city should exact its pound of flesh, drive the Carthage Electric Company out of business absolutely, and itself undertake the venture of conducting the street railway system for its own exclusive benefit and profit. There were many men, honest and sincere, who adopted this view, as well as numerous demagogues who affected it. The question was at least fairly debatable, as

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eliminating the bribery and corruption which had disgraced the controversy hitherto; though there were those who did not now hesitate to impute double dealing to Price, especially after the announcement of his engagement to Miss Everett.

No man can long continue conspicuous in American public life, however honorable his career, or pure his motives, without becoming a target for calumny, sooner or later, and Price now came in for his full share of it; but he faced it cheerfully.

"I don't care if the whole city condemns me, if I know I am right," he said to Vivian, who had come to him much troubled by a scurrilous attack in one of the Carthage papers, which were now once more divided in sentiment.

She came to see him every day, for he reserved for her an hour when all other visitors were excluded.

Much of this sort of abuse was adroitly fomented by Evans, who had now come out openly for municipal operation of the trolley system. That gentleman had waited upon Price in the confident expectation of the editor's alliance in his newly aroused enthusiasm for socialistic reform, and was bitterly disappointed at what he chose to term the treason of Price to his own principles, — for naturally he could n't see the point of the editor's objection to one Thomas Evans in the capacity of railway superintendent.

"Well, I suppose we will have to fight it out again,"

sighed the boss, regretfully. "I shall beat you easily this time, however, as it is you, not I, that will have to carry the incubus; you will find that greedy crew of money bags a heavy handicap, — I warn you in advance."

"Perhaps, were I trying to carry them at all," acknowledged Price. "I don't care what you say of me, Evans, or what you affect to believe; such talk won't alter the facts. You can't fool the people all the time, though you may succeed in throwing dust in their eyes for a season."

"I don't know that I blame you, after all," retorted his antagonist, with his blandest smile. "She is a fine girl, my lad, and well worth the winning. You have forced old Everett to give you his richest treasure in return for your support. You held him up for a good big stake, and I congratulate you."

"I hardly like to order you out of the room," said Price, hotly, "but I shall have to do it, if you continue in that strain."

"As you please," said Evans, suavely. It was difficult to quarrel with him, he was so gifted with the art of turning the other cheek. "I like you, Price," he persisted, "and the girl you are going to marry is one of the fairest and most intellectual in this whole city of fair and cultivated women. You can take that statement as an insult if you choose, but I can't see it that way. Come, man, I would be your friend still if you would let me, but any-

how, I can be an appreciative opponent. You do me the justice to believe that I had no hand in the wicked attack upon you?"

"No direct hand; it was n't what you planned, Evans," retorted Price, "but it was a dirty trick, all the same, and will be sure to bring its own punishment in the end."

"I am innocent, wholly innocent of the assault," protested the politician, much hurt.

"Of that, yes; but you would have had me arrested, kept away from the caucus by force, and the mass meeting broken up by the police."

"I see you are well informed," admitted Evans. "Everett has evidently been talking. Well, it was all in the game. You ought to know enough of politics to recognize that and not bear any malice."

"All right," said Price, with an inscrutable smile, "kindly remember that doctrine when your chickens come home to roost."

"There's my hand on it," agreed Evans, and the men shook hands after the fashion of two stalwart bruisers, about to enter the prize ring.

As a matter of fact, Price could not help liking the "boss" in spite of his serious defects of character, and his insidiously corrupting influence. There was that power, manhood, about him, that always makes a freebooter interesting in history or in fiction, — a redness of blood, to

use the political phrase of the day, a kindness of heart, a readiness of sympathy that saw where help was needed around the rough corners of life.

Above all, Price could not forget that it was Evans who had given him the start in life that had made possible his subsequent career. If he could have done so without sacrifice of principle he would have been glad to remain one of the politician's friends and supporters; and he always contended that it was Evans, not he, that had broken their original compact. So it was they parted with mingled feelings of antagonism and good will, once more to engage in a struggle which could only end in the overthrow of one or the other.

For a third time the contest was now on. First Price and Evans had united to humble the haughty and greedy corporation. Then the politician, for reasons of his own, had seen fit to lend his influence to that corporation, and together they had sought to crush Price, who had barely survived the struggle, but had managed to come out of the *mêlée* victorious. Now, on the other hand, it was Price who had made terms with the cause of capital, though those terms were on behalf of the municipality at large, while Evans, on the other hand, had thought best to ally himself with the socialists and enthusiasts, and the final battle between these newly alligned forces was now fast approaching.

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As Evans had shrewdly intimated, Price, however pure his motives, was now heavily handicapped. He could no longer rely upon fervid appeals to the passions of the masses, but must rest his case upon calm logic and hard facts to meet and overcome, if possible, the demagogic fury he had himself helped to arouse, in the heat of controversy, whercof the astute politician to whom he was opposed now reaped the full advantage.

Practically speaking, Evans started the fight with the game all in his own hands. Out of the twenty-one votes in the Board of Aldermen he was reputed absolutely to control eight or ten; for he could have forced the franchise through had he been able to nominate his own man in the Seventeenth. The socialists and labor element contributed six or seven more who were just as much opposed to the proposed lease as they had been to the original franchise grab. At the very outset, therefore, it was only a small minority of the council that was open to conviction on the question at all. In fact, only three or four of the aldermen, out of a total of twenty-one, had as yet openly accepted the leadership of Price, or pledged themselves to vote for the plan he proposed. The newspapers of the city, with the single exception of the "News," made forecasts of the vote in the council which credited Evans and his allies with a sweeping victory for municipal control and operation of the trolley system.

Price himself recognized all this clearly enough and for a time almost despaired of being able even to make a respectable showing in the fight, but he was none the less determined to go down to defeat, if he must, with his colors nailed to the mast.

"It is n't always so easy to check popular clamor, when once aroused," remarked Everett, ruefully, as he was discussing the situation with Price at the hospital, and reviewing its discouraging features.

"I don't want to check it," returned the editor. "It is something the people have a right to clamor about, if they want to, and a question it is theirs to decide, whether wisely or no. I have taken my position, and am confident that it is a just one, but this time it is a matter of public policy, merely. If the majority of the council were going to vote as the representatives of their constituents and in that capacity alone, I would abandon the struggle this very moment. But the real trouble is that more than half of the men who are opposed to us have given no thought to the question, and do not propose to. They intend to vote as politicians, as men who hold office to do what the 'boss' tells them to do, and I feel justified in taking measures accordingly. This franchise question is n't going to be settled in any such fashion, — not if I can help it."

"The Evans crowd would be a nice gang to run a street railway," remarked the financier.

"Does n't Evans run it, pretty much, as it is?" queried Price.

"What do you mean?"

"Are not nine tenths of your minor employees at present named on his recommendation, and held in place in return for political favors?"

"I have never heard of it, if it is so," protested Everett, who had paid little attention to the details of street railway management, during the comparatively short time he had been so heavily interested in the company.

"All these politicians run a vast employment agency," explained Price, "and Bleeker, since his defeat, two years ago, never appoints even a motorman without a line of recommendation from Tom Evans."

"No wonder our operating expenses have increased out of all proportion," exclaimed the banker.

"We will change all that when we have thrown off the yoke of this old man of the sea, who is sapping the very life blood of our body politic," assured his future son-in-law.

But with all his self-confidence, Price now received a check that filled him with concern. Professor Johannes Schneeberg, the venerable and widely respected incumbent of the chair of ethics and political economy in the University of Carthage, came out in a well-penned public letter for municipal control and operation of the franchise, and many of the best and most reputable citizens followed

his lead and stood ready to play into the hands of the "Boss."

The very night before the common council was to meet and decide the momentous question of the hour, a cab was driven from the Union Railway Station to the hospital, and three men alighted and asked for Price. A few minutes later he was awakened, and the men were shown to his room.

"It seems too good to be true," he cried, as he shook hands with Attorney Davidson. "Good work, Allie Latham, great work; I'll not forget it in a hurry."

The third visitor was a big, surly fellow with low forehead and a shock of coarse red hair, none other than our mutual friend, the "Red Spider."


"Thank you for coming; I bear you no malice," said Price, as he shook the man by the hand.

CHAPTER XXVI

TOO MANY COOKS

MRS. DEWITT and Mrs. Dubois hastened to congratulate Mrs. Everett as soon as they learned of Vivian's engagement, the announcement of which was the social sensation of the season. There had been a mild flurry among the Carthage four hundred when it was discovered that Archie Dean was going to marry little Miss Chalmers, and it had been currently reported among the knowing ones that Vivian's guest had stolen away her sweetheart, that she was broken-hearted over it, and Dean a culpably gay deceiver, who was n't well off with the old love before he was on with the new; in fact, the gossips had the story quite as correctly as is usually the case, all of which tended to enhance the excitement when it transpired that Miss Everett had so swiftly found consolation in the strenuous editor of the "Carthage News."

Mrs. Everett received the advances of the two ladies with dignified reticence. She proposed to have her attitude in the matter felt rather than spoken; but she was taken quite aback when the professor's wife exclaimed: "Won't it be nice to have an editor right in your own family circle?"



"Why so?" asked Mrs. Everett, doubtfully, for this phase of the situation had never presented itself to her mind hitherto.

"Oh, because we three can sit right here, by your own gas log, and mould public sentiment as we choose," said Mrs. DuBois.

"Yes," chimed in the minister's wife, "we can now set about our long contemplated crusade for dress reform, and prepare the leading editorials on the subject ourselves, right here in this room."

"Hardly," protested Mrs. Everett, with an air of finality. "You know very well, Mrs. DeWitt, that I never was a dress reformer, and never will be."

"Oh, well, then we will have to give that up, for the present," sighed her friend; "but we can have our Servants' Training School, can't we? You favor that, don't you, Mrs. Everett?"

"I think that, perhaps, Mr. Price might be induced to consider the matter," replied the editor's prospective mother-in-law, with lofty condescension.

"And you will surely have him advocate our Social Settlement Home?" urged Mrs. DuBois.

"Do you really think we need one just yet?" demurred Mrs. Everett.

"Of course we do!" exclaimed her two callers in a breath,

"Would n't it be better to organize a central guild and turn the real slumming work over to a corps of deaconesses?"

"Oh, we all love to do slumming," protested the clergyman's wife; "we would n't give up that part of it for anything."

"It's so exciting, you know," rejoined Mrs. DuBois.

"Well, we will see what can be done about it, as soon as this dreadful franchise controversy is over," promised Mrs. Everett, with a smile of self-complacency.

"What can't be cured must be endured," was her philosophy; but she had begun to discover that she had become a more important person, in the estimation of her set, as the result of Vivian's engagement, for every woman with a fad to exploit, or a hobby to ride, began to seek her out as the coming "power behind the throne." The ladies all seemed to take it for granted that Mrs. Everett would in the near future control the editorial policy of the "News." What was the use of being the mother-in-law of its editor if she could n't? In point of fact, she had begun to entertain some such view herself.

"When we are running the 'News,' " she said to Vivian, after her callers had departed, "Mrs. Arthur Blackstone won't be mentioned in the society column, or Mrs. DeForest, either, — we will let them understand it, too."

"Not even when Ethel Blackstone has her coming out?" queried Vivian, smiling.

"Oh, I've nothing against the child, — but her mother is absolutely impossible; and that Mrs. Upstart, — what's her real name?"

"You mean Mrs. Upshot?"

"Thank you; her parties will be ignored for the future, absolutely ignored!"

"But won't we be obliged to print them somewhere, as a matter of news?" asked Vivian.

"Well, very inconspicuously, then."

"Might n't we mix them up with the 'butter, cheese and eggs' market report?"

"That would be glorious," cried Mrs. Everett. "The Upshots are in the cold storage business. We must attend to that right away."

"Let's see," mused Vivian (the sly minx was anxious to humor her mother), "we could head it like this: 'Butter up to twenty-five a pound; eggs drop to smash — Mrs. Upshot's dance a fizzle — cold storage game very high —'?"

"De-li-cious," purred the delighted Mrs. Everett; "and the Blackballs, we must work up some dig on the Blackballs!"

"You mean the Blackshawls?"

"We always call them the Blackballs; do get up a rap for them."

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So Vivian continued to suggest clever libels on all the people her mother did n't like, while putting dainties in her satchel to take to the hospital, until that lady was in high good humor.

"What tonics are you giving him, Vivian?" she asked, as she watched the assortment of jams, jellies, condensed foods, and invalid's broths, her daughter was endeavoring to pack into one tiny shopping-bag.

"Nothing but beef-wine-and-iron, good food, and plenty of fresh air," replied Vivian; "that's why I'm taking him all this condensed chicken-liver oil."

"Humph, who recommended the beef-wine-and-iron?"

"His mother."

"Oh! — Well, then I suppose we will have to let him take it, though it's dreadfully heating to the blood; but condensed chicken-liver oil! Why, child, it's the very worst thing you could give him."

"Dr. Agnew does n't think so," declared Vivian, aggressively, for she pinned her personal faith to the efficacy of condensed chicken livers.

"But don't they give him hypophosphites?" persisted Mrs. Everett.

"None."

"Nor Pepto-mango?"

"I think not."

"Nor Burdock Blood Bitters?"

"Oh, mother, how can you! That's *way* out of date."

"It took you through scarlatina and measles, just the same."

"But he has n't either of them," observed her daughter, saucily.

"Don't be silly," her mother admonished; "this is too serious a matter. He *must* have a tonic, Vivian — how about cereal milk?"

"But that is n't a tonic," demurred the young lady, beginning to be both amused and gratified at the form her mother's newly aroused interest in Price was taking.

"He *shall* have a tonic; I sha'n't rest until he is taking one," insisted Mrs. Everett.

"Then why not 'Vito-Vitalis'?"

"I never heard of it."

"It's advertised in this week's 'Vogue.'"

"Foolish girl!"

"Well, the nurse says there's a new heart stimulant, — combination of strychnia and quinine, put up in cod-liver oil."

"Rank poisons," pronounced her mother. "Wait a minute, I have it. Dr. Buford's wife made him take Forefathers' Pancreatic Digester, and he gained ten pounds on it in a few weeks. I will ask her about it at once."

So Mrs. Everett called upon Mrs. Buford that very afternoon and arrived at the hospital shortly after with a dozen bottles of "Forefathers' Pancreatic Digester" and

numerous suggestions as to future editorial policy, with both of which she dosed the patient liberally.

"Whatever will you do?" asked Vivian, when her mother had departed. "I will have no peace in my life if you do not advocate every crazy fad that comes along; really it's going to be serious;" and she shook her head gravely as she helped him to a dainty saucer of chicken jelly, with the condensed liver-oil on the side.

Price was enjoying the novel delight of convalescence, — just comfortably sick enough to be coddled by the women that loved him. He had a strong digestion, and good-naturedly partook of every tonic, invalid's food, or other nostrum that was suggested, so that his mother, Vivian, and Mrs. Everett were each able to assert the claim that her own pet diet had done the good work of recuperation.

"Don't worry about that, sweetheart," he said, "it's part of the newspaper business to handle just such problems. We will give your mother and her friends a special department — woman's page, you know, — where nothing will be taken seriously."

"But you can't let her put in digs on people, — like that about the Upshots?"

"Of course not."

"She will insist, and then there will be all sorts of trouble."

"Oh, we can arrange all that. I will let her make up a

list of the four hundred of Carthage, put them all by themselves, in the society column, and every one else under 'personals.'"

"Splendid! But won't the unfortunates classed under 'personals' object?"

"They should be glad to be mentioned at all in such an exclusive paper as the 'News.'"

Those were delightful hours they passed together, there at the hospital, — restful, quiet, soul-soothing, after the stormy days that had brought them together, as they grew in mutual sympathy and understanding and found new delights of geniality and congeniality in one another.

Their talks covered a wide range of topics; for, as Vivian came to know the man she loved more intimately, she lost all that fear of him that had oppressed her in the earlier days of their courtship. Nor did she consider it a part of his duty to study her moods and whims, and mould his own accordingly. He was not her "chattel" in any sense, but part and parcel of herself, as much so when she gossiped of trifles, and laughed in gay frivolity, as in her more serious moments; for there was always between them that deep undercurrent of affection that flowed placidly, strongly on, despite all ripples on the surface.

And so it was that John Price gathered strength and power once more to face the bustle of events and the fierce struggle for mastery of the city's destiny that was impending.

CHAPTER XXVII

LOADED DICE

ARCHIE DEAN and Electa persuaded Mrs. Everett to attend the meeting of the Common Council which was to decide the momentous franchise question and to bring along her friends of the Educational and Industrial Union. In fact, from the foundation of the municipality, Carthage City Hall had seldom seen such a gathering as assembled that evening. Long before eight o'clock, the galleries were filled to overflowing, and not a chair remained vacant in the great auditorium, while in the crowded aisles rough jackets and frock-coats jostled elbow to elbow, in amazingly democratic and friendly fashion.

Andrews of the Carpenters' Union found a seat beside Nathan Everett, Robert Bleeker shook hands with Professor Johannes Schneeberg, Evans and Dr. Buford sat side by side, and many another incongruous personal contrast presented itself. It was a thoroughly American assembly, — good-naturedly turbulent, tensely in earnest, and yet, withal, jocular.

Vivian, who came with Mrs. Price, and occupied a

seat in the front row of the gallery next to Archie Dean and Electa, had never witnessed anything like this scene in her whole life and watched and listened with cheeks flushed and eyes glowing, now and then asking eager questions of Dean concerning features of the affair which she did not understand. For the first time she was being given a glimpse of the passions and emotions that sway masses of men; the great seething caldron of political conflict; the ganglion cells of struggling human atoms whence are evolved the principles of self-government, order, probity; the laws of modern civilization; the foundations of abiding wealth; the very corner-stone of the social fabric whereof the grace of culture and the refinement of luxury are the superstructure.

All this was gradually dawning upon her, as she looked about and saw how all classes and conditions of men were here gathered, drawn by their common interest in a topic of vital municipal concern. Everything was as strange to her and as interesting as the pages of a new and stirring romance.

"What are those pictures on the walls?" she asked, pointing to an array of life-sized portraits ranged about the auditorium.

"Those are the city's early mayors and aldermen," explained Dean, "who calmly look down upon the deliberations of succeeding generations. Among them you will

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notice old 'prairie dogs' who affected cow-boy shirts, even when sitting for a picture. Look at those bewhiskered patriarchs of farm and sheep-pen; observe the gentlemen adventurers who made places for themselves as 'tender-feet' in the formative period of the young city, only a generation ago."

"How interesting!"

"Who is that man with the pink cheeks and bald head?" whispered Mrs. DeWitt behind them. "Why do they applaud him so?"

"That's Tom Evans, the boss of Carthage," explained the obliging Mr. Dean, who had been delegated the post of guide and general information bureau.

"*That* Evans! Why, he looks like a gentleman!" cried the clergyman's wife in astonishment; but her suggestive remark was drowned by the deafening cheers from the Evans retainers, who were out in force that night.

The boss smiled and bowed; for once he seemed in high popular favor. Close upon his heels came Professor Schneeberg, followed by a company of respectable and enthusiastic gentlemen of much erudition and small incomes who were so innocently playing into the hands of the politicians.

Under his arm the venerable professor carried, in a vast roll, a monster petition for municipal operation of the street railway, circulated by the well-organized cohorts

of the Evans machine, and signed by more than ten thousand persons, not ten of whom had given five minutes' serious thought to the subject; but their aggregate ignorance made an impressive display.

"We could have had fifty thousand names just as well, if there had been time," asserted Professor Schneeberg, with just confidence, as he placed the voluminous roll on the clerk's desk. This remark was the signal for prolonged and vociferous cheers, as well as a few hisses and cat-calls from the rear of the galleries, which represented nothing but love of noise, that now grew into a deafening uproar, as John Price appeared and hobbled to his seat among the aldermen, upon crutches.

It didn't do any harm to his cause, this physical disability, for it served to remind the audience of his unsparing devotion to the public interest, and his advent was now heralded by the wildest burst of applause of the whole evening,—one in which all factions joined. The "Alderman from the Seventeenth" was quickly surrounded by an admiring group of his fellow-councilmen, Fagan and Driscoll being among the first to extend the "right hand of fellowship."

Business then opened with the usual rapid routine of an American legislative body. First and second ordinances, petitions, resolutions, reports of committees, the monthly budget, two vetoes from the mayor, were all

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droned off in rattling monotone by the clerk. Vote after vote on these minor matters was taken, either by *viva voce* or on roll call, according to the nature of the business and the rules of council procedure.

"What is it all about?" queried Vivian of Dean, in great perplexity.

"They are legislating for the city of Carthage," explained Dean, with a cynical smile.

"But how do they know what it is they are voting for? I can't understand a word, the man mumbles so; and it all goes on, just like the rattle of machinery."

"Exactly, — it's all cut and dried beforehand. No one pays any attention to what is being read. It's a mere matter of form."

"But, gracious, I thought they talked things over!"

"So they do, beforehand, — in committee or in caucus."

"And won't there be any speeches at all?" she asked, in keen disappointment.

"Oh, they will shoot off some fireworks on the franchise question for our benefit; but we are licked in advance, just the same," said Dean, ruefully. "Evans had fifteen votes out of twenty-one, all counted last night."

"Can't Mr. Price do anything?"

"He will try, of course, but there is n't a ghost of a chance. Watch; listen, it's coming now!"

A murmur of suppressed excitement now spread through-

out the chamber, for at last the chief business of the evening had been reached in due order. The clerk read off, in ordinary sing-song, the carefully drawn resolution, framed by Price and Archie Dean, in consultation with the city's official legal adviser, whereby the operation of the trolley lines was to be leased to the Carthage Electric Company substantially on the terms already outlined.

When the clerk had finished, Chairman Driscoll asked the conventional question: "Gentlemen, are you ready for the question?"

"I move, Mr. Chairman," said an Evans alderman, according to program, "that Professor Johannes Schneeberg, of the University of Carthage, be accorded the privilege of the floor."

"If there is no objection we will hear Professor Schneeberg," said the chairman.

The venerable scholar had brought his theories with him from continental Europe, and proceeded to exploit them. He was not a public orator, but addressed the vast audience with didactic precision, as though they were all pupils in his class-room. He began with the now undisputed premise that the franchise was the exclusive property of the city of Carthage. He contended that the railway could be operated by the city itself at an annual profit of over a million dollars, that the tax levy was only three million; that with care and economy

and the gradual reclaiming of other municipal franchises, there need n't be any taxes at all. His voice growing in prophetic fervor and becoming more pronounced in German accent, he outlined a forecast of the day when municipal wealth would be so great that the body politic would pay dividends to its citizens, instead of levying taxes upon them, and all men could live to bring out the best that was in them, free from the spectre of starvation and the stunting blight of poverty.

Thomas Evans smiled suavely, as Professor Schneeberg sat down. Never before had his cause been championed more plausibly, while visions of graft unlimited, and power impregnably intrenched, arose before him. What was the *petit pourboire* from the Carthage Electric, which he had been obliged to forego, compared with the vast sums his appointees would handle as officers and employees of the street railway system of Carthage? Who could thereafter successfully make headway against him? How many friends could he reward; what scores of enemies could he scourge and humiliate; and he rubbed his hands in unctuous gratification and smiled his blandest and most benevolent smile.

The hall was packed with his henchmen and heelers, and they clapped and stamped as Schneeberg sat down until the lights of the hall were dimmed by suffocating clouds of dust, and those who refrained from applauding

were forced to lend involuntary accompaniment in a general chorus of coughs and sneezes.

"Faugh!" cried Dean.

"I shall smother," exclaimed Mrs. Everett, rising as if to depart.

"Wait, mother, wait," cried Vivian, "we can't go yet; John is just going to speak."

The demonstration subsided as the young editor painfully arose, supporting himself by his chair, and secured recognition from Chairman Driscoll. His face was pale and his right cheek was marked by a red scar which he would carry to his grave. His eyes were somewhat sunken, but they glowed with their old energy and fire, and his voice was as strong as ever, filling the auditorium to its most remote corner, without apparent effort. In spite of his recent illness, he seemed the embodiment of vital energy, and as one born to acquire mastery over the minds of his fellow men.

Vivian looked down from her seat in the gallery upon the scene below with intense interest. She had never before beheld Price from this point of view, and only knew the tenderer side of his character. Was it possible that they were one and the same, her high-minded, gentle lover, and this stern, bold man of affairs, in the thick of the turmoil and hurly-burly of events? As she began to realize that it was in such atmosphere his whole pre-

vious life had been passed,—that it was amid scenes like these he was to fight his future battles and win his victories, or meet his defeats, she grew, in that moment, better to understand and appreciate what manner of man he was whose love had come to be the law of her life; and there opened to her vision a new conception of their relations and of the part she would be called upon to play in the world, as the helpmeet and companion of such a husband.

It was of all this she was thinking, rather than the immediate result of the present controversy,—for she had accepted Dean's dictum that Price was leading a forlorn hope, preaching unwelcome doctrine to wilfully deafened ears, and must, of necessity, go down to defeat. To her view it seemed just as noble, just as inspiring to fight for the right, "as God gave him to see the right,"—and lose, as it was to win the most splendid victory. It was the sense of conflict, strong and righteous, that made her whole being tremble with suppressed emotion.

Not so her father. His hope to save his fortune from financial shipwreck, aroused by Price, after he had given himself over to despair, once more seemed to have been taken from him by the unsparing hand of fate, and he listened, with bated breath, for the final roll-call.

Although Price did not rely upon the power of persuasion alone, to win over a machine Board of Aldermen,

already pledged against him, he hoped to reach a few members of the council whom he knew to be still open to conviction.

"I should like to see the city of Carthage pay dividends," he began, "though we would then have to build a rampart around it higher than the wall of China to keep out the tide of population that would swarm hither to share in our good fortune and draw their checks; not until the whole world pays dividends to its entire population could there be any other result. But it would be an inspiring sight, that vast line of humanity filing up to the window of the city treasurer and presenting their credentials."

There was some laughter at this sally, and Professor Schneeberg frowned,— for his scholasticism was n't accustomed to the *reductio ad absurdum*.

"And when it comes to a public dividend," continued Price, "why wait for the millennium? Why not begin now, with our water-works, which are already under municipal control? What did they cost to establish? How many dollars do they produce?"

Carefully and in detail he proceeded to cover the entire field of municipal extravagance and mismanagement under the Evans *régime*, with facts and figures at his tongue's end, until he had accumulated a mass of evidence which made overwhelming demonstration of the fact


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that Carthage, instead of paying dividends, had already exceeded her debt limit, with increased and increasing burdens of taxation for every fresh enterprise she had undertaken.

"Do you suppose," he continued, "that we have made this fight simply to turn over our railway system to the corrupt bureaucrats of a municipal machine? From first to last I have protested against any such pitiful folly. Do not be deceived, either by amiable and pleasant-spoken theorists, or by those who would line their own pockets at our expense.

"From now on we must work together to overcome this force that is sapping the very life-blood, the moral sinew and fibre of this community. It is no time to mince words, gentlemen. I refer to the organization which rules us, the kind, benevolent pseudo-philanthropists who hold this city in their throttling grasp, corrupt and corrupting, whose baneful influence may be likened to that of the false shepherds of Lycidas: 'swollen with wind, and the rank mists they draw, rot inwardly and foul contagion spread.'

"We are awake to-night, awake to our interests, our rights, our privileges; but to-morrow we shall sleep, hibernate, until another summer of civic patriotism and civic pride. Meanwhile, the political machine of Carthage runs on, as it always runs, day and night, week in and



week out, Sundays and holidays. It is that machine which proposes to assume control of the city's trolley lines, as it now controls every other branch of municipal government. Believe me, gentlemen, under these conditions there will be no such profit to the city and its citizens as you reckon, no such reduction in the tax-rate as you imagine. The workers and the heelers will run the motors and collect the fares, keep the books and take account of the receipts.

"Let me put the proposition in a business way: The city has just fallen heir to an inheritance of \$15,000,000. The question is, shall it invest the money in absolutely secure, permanent coupon-bonds; or shall it go into the street railway business and speculate for a higher rate of interest?

"Finally, let me make it clear that we should conserve the interests of the city on the one hand, and on the other give fair and free scope for private capital and individual ability. That, I take it, is the very essence of American institutions, the very germ of our national prosperity. It is for those institutions, for that prosperity, and against mere theories, however brilliant and scholarly their advocates, and socialistic fallacies however plausible, that I take my stand to-night, and ask you, my fellow aldermen, to stand with me."

Price sat down amidst prolonged applause; but noth-

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ing he had said had served to disturb Evans, or give much hope to Everett. It was votes, not eloquence or logic, that were to decide the matter, and the "boss" had the votes counted.

"Was n't it grand?" sighed Vivian.

"We are going to win, are n't we?" queried Electa.

"He really made a fine address," commented Mrs. Everett.

"Splendid," acknowledged Dean, "but I am afraid it will prove not of the slightest consequence. We have the best of the argument, and are clearly in the right; but it takes more than that to win when you are shaking dice with the devil."

CHAPTER XXVIII

COUP DE GRÂCE

THOMAS EVANS had been conspicuous among those who applauded the maiden speech of the young editor as a member of the Carthage City Council, for he could afford to be magnanimous and ignore the thinly veiled personal affront which Price had thought it was his duty to administer. It is easy to be gracious when one is in the ascendant. Never before had his power seemed so secure, his prospects so brilliant. A "boss" is seldom personally popular, in a public sense, and is usually compelled to take his face out of the lime-light. But Evans had that evening received the gratification of a public ovation, and it pleased him to the very soul.

There was breathless silence as Driscoll asked the formal question whether there were any further remarks. No more speeches were anticipated or desired, and there were loud calls of "Question!" from the impatient spectators.

Then there was a stir at the rear of the hall. Some one was shouting: "Make way, there, make way, I tell you!"


John Price lifted himself to his feet once more and held up a warning hand. "One moment, Mr. Chairman, if you please," he said, "one moment until order is restored."

Even as he spoke three men elbowed their way through the crowd and took seats in vacant chairs which the Alderman from the Seventeenth had reserved for them, directly behind his own desk.

One of the newcomers was Attorney Davidson, the second was reporter Latham, of the "News," and the third, shuffling between them, was that burly, ungainly bruiser and denizen of the slums of Carthage, "The Red Spider!"

With what skill and assiduity the newspaperman had traced the fugitive prize-fighter from place to place, until he had finally located him in a low New York city dive, how he relieved the fellow's fears by assuring him that Price was alive and on the road to recovery, when, for all the bruiser knew to the contrary, he was wanted in the West on charge of murder, and how Latham had finally persuaded the Red Spider to return to Carthage, and had kept him secreted there until this moment, would almost make a novel in itself.

At all events, he had proved very willing to accept the promise of immunity from action which Price had given, and had undertaken to turn States' evidence, if occasion



required, against the men who had designed the assault and egged him on to execute their purpose.

Driscoll did not, for the moment, see what had happened. Evans failed even to notice the coming of this fresh group of spectators, and was calmly chatting with Professor DuBois on the theme of the moment.

"The question recurs on the adoption of the resolution," said the chairman. "Those favoring will respond in the affirmative, those opposing in the negative; the clerk will call the roll."

Then Clerk O'Mally arose and began the roll-call: "First ward, Alderman Fagan."

But there was no response. Fagan, for the last few moments had been staring, open-mouthed, at Price and the group of men behind him. Fagan was n't blind to the significance of the presence of the Red Spider in the Council Chamber. It meant that John Price was then and there in a position to bring home the murderous assault upon him to those who were directly and criminally responsible for it, and the guilty politician trembled in every limb, cowering before the stern gaze of Price, who glared upon him with a look that proclaimed the editor master of the man and of the situation.

It was in that mutual interchange of glances between Patrick Fagan and John Price that the franchise controversy was debated that night, rather than in the speeches

that had outlined the divergent policies or the popular plaudits that had acclaimed the orators. The scene at the Sphinx Saloon rose before Fagan's mental vision; he could smell the rank liquor, see the bloodshot eyes of the motley crew that drank it, hear their oaths, coarse laughter, and brutal jests as they were incited to the point of frenzied hate against the editor, and went forth, like blood-hounds unleashed, to strike him down from behind in the dark, on his way to the mass meeting, trample upon him, beat him, and leave him for dead.

Fagan's malice had found him out, and his teeth chattered in his head as he thought of the fearful consequences; was Price going to accuse him before that vast assemblage of his fellow townsmen? Was it not likely, should the editor do so, that the enraged populace would tear him limb from limb? — red thoughts like these chased through his terror-stricken mind like lightning.

Fagan's conscience had made a coward of him. Ordinarily he was bold enough, but he measured Price by his own standards, and shrank in his seat like a whipped cur. To his disordered fancy under this suddenly-sprung surprise, it now seemed that Price had but to say the word to have him seized, right there in the Council Chamber, and hurried to the nearest lamp-post without, where his body would dangle until morning, full of bullet holes.

It had not been so very many years since such things had occurred in the city of Carthage, and Fagan had personally witnessed a similar spectacle in his youth. The times had changed, to be sure, but he had not changed with them, being himself a survival of those rough and ready days of brute force and brute cunning.

"First ward, Alderman Fagan," repeated the clerk, adding: "How do you vote, Mr. Fagan?"

"Just a moment," stammered the Alderman from the First, as he staggered over to where Price was sitting. "What does this mean?" he gasped, in a whisper, pointing to the Red Spider.

"You know well enough what it means, Pat Fagan," said Price, sternly. "The situation speaks for itself."

"Then you want me to vote aye?" faltered Fagan, half dazed by the unexpected and appalling situation.

"Vote as you please," said the editor, contemptuously. It was the only vengeance he ever deigned to take. For once Patrick Fagan would "see fit" to vote against the machine, whereof he was himself one of the most slippery cog-wheels.


He looked about him desperately, at the sea of faces in the auditorium, at the panic-stricken countenance of Driscoll, who now saw and knew, at the suave and smiling face of the still oblivious Evans, near at hand; then at the dogged countenance of the Red Spider and the fiercely

determined features of John Price. If he could only have time! — time to think — time to plot, to dodge, to squirm, to jump out of a difficulty and land upon his feet, as he had done on many another occasion. But the delay he had already made in the progress of the proceedings had served to fix all eyes upon him, and make him the observed of all observers.

Though the actual facts of the case were never a matter of general public knowledge, some inkling of the real situation got abroad, whispered suspicions set afloat by men in the audience who knew how closely Fagan was identified with the gang led by the Red Spider, and who saw that worthy sitting behind John Price, whose face still bore the mark of that red and ugly scar, and cries of "Shame, shame!" began to be heard in different parts of the hall. That was the last straw,—Fagan dared hesitate no longer. "I vote aye," he said in a low voice, and sank into his chair in a state of utter collapse.

To the vast majority of the audience this sudden desertion of his life-long associates by such a dyed-in-the-wool politician as the Alderman from the First came like a bolt from out the blue.

"I can't understand it at all," whispered Dean, jubilantly, in the ear of Vivian Everett. "Price seems to have managed, somehow, to hypnotize the fellow. What can it mean?"



Evans, suddenly heeding, was equally startled, puzzled, and astonished. "What's that? What did he say?" he cried in a loud voice, so taken by surprise that he threw caution to the winds, and even for the moment forgot the decorum of council procedure, in which he had been schooled by twenty years of service in the Board of Aldermen.

"We did n't hear him; how did he vote?" inquired a number of other voices in chorus.

"Gentlemen will come to order," said Driscoll, rapping with his gavel, and glad of a diversion.

"He votes 'aye,' Mr. Evans," volunteered Clerk O'Mally.

"But I don't understand, what does it mean?" queried the bewildered politician, quite beside himself.

"It means, Mr. Evans," cried Price, so that all might hear, "it means that the rats are deserting a sinking ship. Let the roll-call proceed, if you please, Mr. Clerk."

This sharp sally was greeted by a chorus of deafening cheers from the fickle members of the audience, who made most of the noise, turbulently reinforced by the, until that moment disheartened, supporters of John Price,—even sedate individuals like Buford, DuBois, Everett, and Dean waving their hats and cheering like mad. Amidst it all the roll-call was steadily proceeding:

"Guggenheimer:"—"No." (Guggenheimer had once been a pupil of Professor Schneeberg.)

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"Harman:"—"Aye." (Harman was a business man and had been converted by Price's illustration of a business investment as against a speculation.)

"Fox:"—"No." (A laborite.)

"Oh dear, how can they; it's going against us!" exclaimed Electa.

"Wait, watch," whispered Dean. "Price looks like a man who expects to win."

"Driscoll!"

The chairman was a man of higher type of mind than Fagan, and for that reason was, from a moral point of view, more guilty, though less susceptible to brute fear. Price had concentrated his fire upon the weaker vessel, especially as Fagan was first called upon to vote. But if Driscoll was less cowardly, he had more to lose, for he was a man of respectable reputation, and, to do him full justice, had not wholly realized the significance of the scene enacted at the Sphinx, for the thugs were Fagan's peculiar followers, and Driscoll had attended more as a lieutenant of the boss to see that the move planned by the general was duly executed.

Driscoll had more time to collect himself than Fagan, and he had more brains to take a rapid view of the whole situation; but his coward conscience also got the better of him in the end, and he determined to commit an act of treachery to his political superior, and

at the same time make for himself what political capital he could.

"I want to explain my vote," he said. "Until to-night I had made up my mind to oppose this resolution, but after hearing my good friend and brother alderman, Mr. Price, who has given this subject much more thought than I have, and who has fought and even bled in the cause of all of us, I have changed my mind, and, from sincere conviction, gentlemen, I vote, — 'Aye!'"

Thomas Evans gasped, as though with pain. He had, indeed, received a body blow.

The audience now cheered Driscoll to the echo, and some one shouted: "Down with the boss!"

For the moment pandemonium broke loose, as the cry was taken up all over the hall: "Down with Evans!" "Put the boss out of business," "Smash the machine," and the like, resounded in every direction.

Once more the chairman rapped for order, gratified by the glory which seemed to crown his political treason, and quiet was at last restored so that the roll-call could be concluded.

But the defection of Fagan and Driscoll from the Evans ranks had done its work, while the general uproar aided to produce a "stampede" the like of which had not been seen in Carthage since it was a rolling prairie, roamed by wild bison herds. The Evans heelers among the

aldermen, not in the least understanding the situation, but realizing that there had been a "straight tip" from some source that seemed to reverse all former instructions, took their cue from Fagan and Driscoll and hastened to fall in line, or, as the political phrase of the day has it, to "climb in on the band wagon."

When the Seventeenth ward was reached on the roll-call and Price voted "Aye," amid loud acclaim, the victory for honest conservatism in the city of Carthage was already won, and the downfall of the Evans machine, for the time being, at all events, fully accomplished.

"Fifteen ayes, six noes, Mr. Chairman," announced the clerk.

"The resolution is adopted," declared Driscoll, in unwavering monotone. "The next order of business is action on final ordinances."

But, despite the chairman's *sang froid*, under cover of which he had been able to cloak his cowardly fears, and desert his political chieftain without the quiver of an eyelid, no further business could be transacted by the council that night.

Evans was badly shaken, but his amiable *aplomb* never entirely deserted him, and he was the first to shake Price by the hand and congratulate him. "You have paid me in my own coin, and no mistake," he said *sotto voce*, "and I stick to my agreement and won't squeal,

though my chickens have come home to roost with a vengeance. It was a wonderful manoeuvre, and daringly executed. I could n't have done it better myself."

The compliment was genuine enough, and was the highest he could pay. The power of his machine had met a disaster from which it would take all his most adroit manipulation to recover, and he mentally resolved never again to chance such an encounter with the man who had so out-generalled him on this occasion. Whether two such men can live in harmony in one small city, whatever their mutual good-will, is a problem only the future can solve.

The editor was soon surrounded by a throng of friends and admirers, a circle that had enlarged wonderfully during the last half hour.

"You have saved me, my boy," whispered Nathan Everett, as he clasped Price by the hand.

"We have saved Carthage," was the reply.

"I did not dream you would be able to meet Tom Evans on his own battle ground and outwit him," applauded the now jovial and delighted banker.

"I stood for what I thought was right and fought with the weapons our adversaries themselves placed in our hands," returned Price. "If there had been a brave or an honest creature in the whole beastly crew, he would have stuck to his colors like a man, instead of slinking to the rear at the first scent of danger like a cur."

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In truth, Price was rather disgusted at the exhibition he had witnessed, and, in spite of himself, could n't well help sympathizing with the discomfited boss of Carthage. To be served by such dastards was enough to dishearten the boldest and most adroit buccaneer.

The excitement which had borne him up throughout the evening having subsided, Price now leaned back in his chair, pale and weary, as Vivian and his mother now made their way to his side.

"You must come away this instant, must n't he, Mrs. Price?" commanded the girl, anxiously. "If I had realized how weak you still were, I would n't have let you come at all.— But was n't it splendid!"

CHAPTER XXIX

CURIOSITY SHOP

SO ended one of the most exciting and bitter controversies the city of Carthage had ever known in her short history. When the smoke of battle cleared away and the Carthage Electric directors began to study the situation, it was discovered, to the astonishment of many of them, that freedom from political blackmail promised, in the long run, to recompense the company, in dollars and cents, for much of the expenditure necessary to meet the now clearly defined obligation to pay the city for what the city gave it.

In the course of time it appeared that, indirectly, the reduction of the burdens of taxation, not only on the property of the company itself, but on that of its principal stockholders, inured largely to its substantial benefit, while the resulting reduction in the tax rate soon brought new business enterprises, rapid increase in population, and a general and wide-reaching prosperity to the municipality, and hence increased railway fares to the coffers of the company.

Was there some gain too in the general tone of the com-

munity, in the indefinite, intangible elements of probity and thrift and *esprit de corps* that began to distinguish it, and advertise it as a prosperous and thriving town?

Leaving the answer to the doctrinaire and the publicist, it would probably prove more amusing to attend the reception which Mrs. Everett gave, a week after the settlement of the franchise controversy, in honor of John Price, especially, as it will be, for us all, sufficient *indicia* of our high social standing and ultra good form,—for the shining lights of her world were exclusively invited, thus setting the seal of her approval on the engagement, and serving to quiet certain unfriendly gossip which had been set afloat, owing to her original position in the matter.

The function was formal and stately to a degree, and was voted intensely stupid by the couple most vitally concerned, though Vivian realized, as perhaps Price did not, that it was a most auspicious occasion from the view-point of her future happiness; for she was fond of society, and well fitted to shine in it, as well as possessing the quality of democratic graciousness, rather rare in American women, but distinctly advantageous to the career of her future husband as a public man.

Of course they did n't have much chance to talk with each other, amid the general clatter of tongues, but they

did manage to find a brief interlude for love-making in the dull void of a conventional evening.

"Well," Price whispered, "does n't this mean that it's about time to name the day, dearest?"

Vivian started and flushed prettily. "Oh, by no means," she faltered; "that won't come for a year yet."

"Could either of us endure this sort of thing for a whole year?" protested her ardent lover.

"Oh, you will soon become accustomed to it. It's the way people have to live, if there is to be any such thing as social intercourse," she declared.

"But we can select our own company when we are once married."

"Surely, — all in good time."

"The best of all times is now," he urged. "I must work, dear, — the 'News' is fairly crying for attention. Everything there is running at loose ends, and it can't be allowed to continue that way much longer, and when I once get back into harness I shall be tied very closely to my desk."

"You shall not; you must not; you need rest and recreation, or your health will never be restored," protested the girl, in quick alarm.

"That is just my point," urged the artful Yankee, seeing his advantage and pressing it home. "I need a vacation and need it now. Let's be married next week and go away for a month; then we will come back and settle down to

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the life of love and labor that lies before us. Say 'yes,' sweetheart — quick."

Of course Vivian demurred and made difficulties; but her love was of that quality she could not well resist long, and before he left the Everetts that evening the momentous question was decided according to his wish. They were to be married in a fortnight and the necessary preparations were begun at once.

Naturally the marriage was a popular as well as a social event, and Vivian insisted upon broad lines in arranging the invitations, especially in view of the wedding presents that began to pour in. The character of some of these occasioned numerous comments by her mother's friends, who, of course, were given a "private view."

"What in the world is this, Vivian?" asked Mrs. Buford, pointing to a silver sword, in miniature, with its point fashioned into a pen.

"Oh, that's a sword-pen, from the newspaper guild, made especially to their order. They had several stormy debates over it before it was finally decided upon, John tells me."

"And this?" queried Mrs. DuBois, indicating a paper-knife of peculiar design and very broad blade.

"That's a trowel from the Bricklayers' Union."

"And who sent this beautifully inlaid cabinet?" inquired Mrs. DeWitt.

"Oh, that's from Mr. Andrews of the Carpenters'

Union; he's a splendid fellow; John introduced him to me."

"Vivian will have to know a lot of queer people; but she seems to like it," sniffed Mrs. Everett, as she exhibited a diamond "sun-burst" from Robert Bleeker, while the ladies all exclaimed at the beauty of a pearl necklace from ex-Congressman Parkerson.

But the visitors had seen presents like these before and turned to admire the weird splendor of a silver punch-bowl from the aldermen of Carthage, the model of a ballot machine from an inventor whom Price had befriended, a boa of ermine from the fur emporium of Thomas Evans, and a luridly illustrated set of Balzac from Inspector Burnham of the Carthage police.

Vivian took the raillery of her mother's friends with extreme good humor; for these were the presents she really liked the best and was most proud of. But the present that perhaps gave her the greatest practical satisfaction was a bundle of stock certificates indorsed over to her by the treasurer of the Carthage Electric Company, upon the authority of its board of directors.

"You see, John will have to pay *me* for his 'News' stock now; for it's all in the family," she explained, laughing. "Won't I keep him at work — see if I don't!"

They were married at high noon by the Rev. Dr. Buford, before a concourse of people that filled the whole church. Andrews of the Carpenters' Union was there, looking stiff

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and uncomfortable in the glory of starch and white linen; Thomas Evans, and several of the members of the Carthage Common Council, the mayor of the city, public officials without number, and a large delegation from the newswriters' guild, were all in attendance, while the *élite* of Carthage was of course largely represented; and Mrs. Price beamed with maternal pride from a pew which she shared with Mr. and Mrs. Everett.

John and Vivian planned a very short wedding trip before returning to a small and unpretentious home not far from that in which the editor had dwelt so long; for Vivian had insisted that they must live near his mother, even though hers protested against the location as unfashionable.

"The people that care for me will come and see me, and the rest can stay away," was her answer.

"It was n't fair of you to get ahead of us, for we were engaged first," said Electa, as she bade her chum farewell.

"Oh, your turn will come soon enough, don't worry about that," interposed Archie Dean. He had acted as best man, and, of course, Electa was maid of honor, and they had both been so busy helping in the hurried wedding preparations that they had had hardly any time for the development of their own future plans; but then, Archie was always more or less busy looking after the interests of other people, and Electa was growing accustomed to it.

"You are pretty slow, dear, but you are waking up gradually," responded his little *fiancée*.

"Is n't he!" cried Vivian. "He has been perfectly splendid all through, — worked and slaved for us like a — like a — a packhorse."

"Thank you," said Mr. Dean. "I am relieved that you could find so respectable an animal for the illustration. Oh, yes, I'm going to be a perfect steam-engine. It's the latest fad, you know."

"A nice, kind one?"

"That never runs over anybody!"

"Oh, it was always in you, Archie," said Vivian, seriously; "and I'm so glad you found the right woman to bring it out. What wretchedness it would have been if you and I had made the mistake of —"

"Of trying to please all our friends, instead of pleasing ourselves," helped out Dean.

"The real trouble is," he continued, "that you, Vivian, were born to rule. Price needs it. It would never have done in my case. My nature requires a sweet, submissive little thing, like Electa, here."

Whereat little Miss Chalmers smiled demurely.

Mr. Archibald Dean was perfectly serious. He was the only person in Carthage unaware of his own abject thralldom.

CHAPTER XXX

CURTAIN

FOR the closing days of their honeymoon-trip John and Vivian took advantage of the offer of Mrs. Chalmers and possessed themselves, for a week, of the Chalmers' cottage at Narragansett, where they passed the bright early winter days in sweet seclusion; — for the big hotels were closed and empty and nearly all the cottages deserted; the whole place, in fact, would have seemed utterly desolate and forlorn to any one else.

But it was here their love had begun, and it was with the rocks and the sea they had come to commune, not with the gay throngs of the "madding crowd."

Here they re-enacted the scenes of their early courtship on the rocks near Point Judith, playing with the wild breakers and strong tide, and peeping into salt pools where pink star-fish ambled amid miniature forests of sea-weed; and at night, when they sat on the rocks and watched the sullen monsters of the deep roll shoreward, the wind swept in from off the sea and sang strange, wild sea-melodies about them. Instinctively they wandered to the point from which on that sweet summer night the overwhelm-

ing power of love had lifted them both up and had mated them with — a kiss.

Vivian looked up into her husband's face and whispered: "This place will be sacred to us both always, dear heart. Your kiss sealed me for yours — though I did not know it then, did not realize it for so long after. And now our love is forever and ever: kiss me again."

"My little wood-violet," he whispered tenderly — pressing his lips to hers in passionate realization of all that he had striven for — and won. "Life is beginning," he said.

In a little cottage on a quiet street, a plainly dressed, gray-haired woman sits at her piano and sings softly to herself, as she stirs the embers of her own long-buried romance, and wonders when the bridal couple will return, — to another fireside — though one so very close at hand.

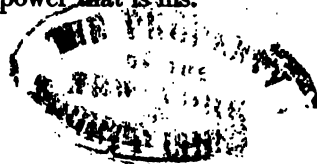
"It's a bit lonely here now," she whispers, as she begins putting out the lights, and is about to retire, though it is still very early. Then the door-bell rings.

"Good-evening, Mrs. Price," calls a cheerful voice; "I've just dropped in to ask what news of the young people?"

It is Thomas Evans! Of all their fine friends he is the one that remembers who is lonely, and "just drops in:" but then, such delicate sympathy is his particular stock in trade, and ~~the chief bulwark of the power that is his.~~

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